The Rise of Twelver Shi'ite Externalism in Safavid Iran and its consolidation under 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (1037/1627-1110/1699)

by

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Declaration

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been previously offered in candidature for any other degree or diploma.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to trace the rise of Twelver Shi'ite externalism in Safavid Iran and its consolidation under the auspices of the era's most renowned scholar, 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī.

Chapter I is the theoretical basis of the study and comprises an in-depth analysis of the concepts of *īmān* (belief), *islām*/Islam (submission) and *'ilm* (knowledge) as portrayed in the Quran, the Traditions, and in exegeses of classical and modern scholars, both Sunnite and Shi'ite.

Chapter II begins with a definition of the terms 'internalism' and 'externalism' in the light of the *īmān* – *islām* dichotomy discussed in Chapter I, and places the subject against a relevant historical backdrop, namely pre-Safavid Iran. The rise of the Safavids, who were later to impose externalist dogma on a populace with decidedly non-externalist religious proclivities, is examined and their motives for choosing Twelver Shi'ism are questioned.

Chapter III covers the Safavid era from the reign of Shah Ismā'īl I to Shah Sultan Ḥusayn and deals with the milieux and teachings of internalist and externalist scholars, the interaction between the two groups, their relations with the rulers of the day, and their attitudes towards the question of government.

Chapter IV is devoted to the life and works of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, the externalist *par excellence* of the Safavid era. His role in the consolidation of the Twelver Shi'ite 'orthodoxy' is reappraised and his attitudes to the state and to non-externalist religious orientations such as Sufism are examined.

Chapter V takes a closer look at those doctrines in Majlisī's *magnum opus* the

Biḥār al-anwār which best exemplify the externalizing tendencies that lie at the root of many Twelver Shi'ite beliefs. The chapter ends with a modern critique of the Safavid *fuqahā'* and a brief comparison of Safavid externalism with current religious trends in Iran.

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Guide to Transliteration

Letter	Transliteration
ا	ʾ
ب	b
ت	t
ث	t͟h
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	d͟h
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	ʿ
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ى	y
پ	p
چ	ch
ژ	z͟h
گ	g

Vowels and Diphthongs

Letter	Transliteration
َ	a
ِ	i
ُ	u
اَ ىَ	ā
ِي	ī
ُو	ū
َيْ	ay
َوْ	aw

INTRODUCTION

The present work began intitially as a study of the life and works of 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, author of the encyclopaedic *Biḥār al-anwār* and a figure whose name is synonymous with the crystallization of Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy in late Safavid Iran. So far-reaching have been the effects of Majlisī's vast literary output, and so revered is his name among Twelver Shi'ite *'ulamā'*, that a Sunnite contemporary, 'Abd al-'Azīz Dihlawī, was impelled to write that Twelver Shi'ism could alternatively be called '*dīn al-Majlisī*, or the 'Majlisī religion.'

Given Majlisī's stature, the paucity of source material on his life and achievements is both a surprise and a source of dismay. Another striking feature is that others' opinions of Majlisī were revealed to be markedly polarized: while some clearly believed that he was the 'renewer' (*mujaddid*) for his own time, others spoke disparagingly of him as a bigot and falsifyer of Traditions. One source describes the era in which Majlisī lived as a time of constant conflict between Sufi and jurisprudent, and it duly became obvious that the diametrically opposed opinions held about Majlisī to some extent reflect this.

Although acquainted with the distinction between the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) in Islam, my general assumption was that they are two complementary facets of the same approach to the Islamic revelation; what gradually became clear was that these two aspects have usually been cleaved apart, with two distinctive groups of scholars emerging, each adhering to its own views and following its own course but with little or no reference to the other group. Another interesting aspect — which, I suspected, was quite unconnected — was the distinction between *īmān* and *islām*, and the fact that the latter term may admit of two radically different

and implicitly contradictory interpretations. The catalyst for my enquiries in this direction was a statement made by one Shi'ite writer in the context of the Iranian revolution of 1978-79, namely that 'what is needed is not a revolution of Islam but a revolution of *īmān*.' Implicit in this view is the idea that Islam may exist without *īmān* and that Muslims may be adherents of their religion without any strong foundation of belief. The ideas behind the statement in question are not peculiar to Shi'ism: one Sunnite scholar asserted that 'there are many adherents of Islam (*muslim*) who are not believers (*mu'min*), just as there are many believers (*mu'min*) who do not adhere to Islam.'

I then began to explore the possibility that the Sufi-*faqīh* 'rift' referred to in the context of Safavid Iran might in some way be connected to the *īmān*/Islam dichotomy. It became obvious in time that there was a connection, and that the overwhelming dominance over the Islamic world of learning by the *mullā* and the *muftī* was inextricably linked with the question of which particular facet of the Islamic revelation — the internal or the external, the exoteric or the esoteric — was given priority.

More importantly, it became clear that the subject had received little or no attention from Western scholars. While the terms *īmān* and *islām* have been covered extensively, they have been done so mainly from the point of view of semantics. The nature of knowledge *'ilm* in Islam has also received much scholarly attention in the West, but the crucial link between *'ilm* and *īmān/islām* has hardly been explored. The terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'*, and their relationship with the predominance of Islam over *īmān*, must be grasped fully if one is to understand why it was possible for two theoretically interdependent but historically antagonistic approaches — the

externalist and the internalist — to come into existence.

Thus I decided not to abandon Majlisī completely but rather to use him as a point of reference in a deeper study of the rise of externalism in Safavid Iran.

The theoretical — and theological — basis of the study hinges on the Quran and the Traditions. The Quranic concepts of *īmān* and *islām*/Islam have been discussed and commentaries upon them — both Sunnite and Shi'ite — have been reviewed and analysed. One of the major factors behind the tendency to ignore, or the inability to distinguish between, the different aspects of the term *islām* is the fact that the early commentaries and *ḥadīth* collections present the subject with a certain amount of ambiguity. These commentaries and collections are discussed and their ramifications for the spread of externalism pointed out. More ambiguous still is the interpretation of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* by various major Muslim scholars through the ages. I will attempt to show the lack of harmony between the Quranic concept of *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* and those interpretations forwarded by both Shi'ite and Sunnite scholars, classical and modern. More importantly, the change of meaning that the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* have undergone through time is crucial if one is to understand why the externalist or exoteric aspect of Islam has been able to prevail over the internalist approach to the Islamic revelation.

Pre-Safavid and Safavid Iran provides a perfect backdrop against which the question of externalism/internalism and the rise of the *faqīh* may be placed in a particular historical context. That Twelver Shi'ism is a natural breeding ground for esotericism has hitherto been axiomatic among many Western scholars. Yet the advent of the Safavid dynasty was the first in a long series of major blows to internalist thought and teaching in Safavid Iran. I have attempted to show that

although the religious orientation of the majority of the Iranian populace prior to the Safavid era was markedly pro-'Alīd, it was in fact at odds with the doctrines of the Twelver jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*) who were imported to act as guardians of the new Safavid state religion. In this respect I have called into question the idea that the establishment of Twelver Shi'ism was a natural extension of pre-existing pro-'Alīd sympathies, but rather that Twelver Shi'ism was a political tool used to impose doctrinal unity on a populace that was definitely non-externalist in its religious proclivities.

A study of the development of Twelver Shi'ism in Safavid Iran comprises the middle section of this thesis. Here the respective outlooks of the externalist and non-externalist/internalist scholars come into focus. The academic output of both groups of scholars is reviewed extensively, as is their interaction with the Safavid rulers. The contention forwarded by scholars such as Said Amir Arjomand and Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpazhūh that Safavid Iran was the scene of a prolonged and often bitter struggle between internalism and externalism is reappraised. Crucial, though, to this section is the question of non-externalism *per se*: in what respect, if any, can orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, given its antagonism towards any kind of religious orientation other than its own, be said to have an internalist face?

Following on from this is a study of 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī and his works. Of all the Safavid Twelver Shi'ite scholars, none is more famous; the works which bear his name are, historically, the most widely read of all popular Twelver Shi'ite religious writings. Yet he contributed virtually nothing to the development of Twelver jurisprudence (*fiqh*) or *ḥadīth* as scholarly disciplines. To what, then, is his popularity and importance in the eyes of his peers and the masses attributable?

An attempt will be made to answer this question by reviewing some of his key writings, particularly those relating to the 'heresy' of Sufism and to the question of the legitimacy of Safavid rule, which Majlisī undoubtedly supported.

Finally, Majlisī's presentation of the twin doctrines of *intiẓār* and *raj'a* are appraised and analysed in depth. The Twelver traditions supporting these doctrines are particularly representative of the spirit of 'imamocentric' externalism championed so staunchly by Majlisī. The concept of the 'return' to earth of the Mahdi and the other Twelver Shi'ite Imams is discussed in terms of the externalization of one of the major principles of Islamic belief, namely the Resurrection. Also tentatively explored is the relationship of Twelver Shi'ite externalism in the Safavid era to the revolutionary Twelver Shi'ism of the Islamic Republic of Iran. To what extent do the Twelver *fuqahā'* of today resemble their Safavid counterparts, and is it possible to describe the Twelver Shi'ism prevalent today as a natural extension of the orthodoxy championed by Majlisī?

A note on the sources

In Chapter I, the theoretical basis of the work, it is the Quran and the Traditions which constitute the major source material. A selection of both Shi'ite and Sunnite *ḥadīth* collections and Quranic commentaries, classical and modern, has been consulted. This applies not only to the question of *īmān* and Islam but also to that of *'ilm* and *'ulamā'*; in the context of the latter, secondary sources such as the works of Muslim modernists (e.g. Sharī'atī, Muṭahharī) have also been used.

The pre-Safavid period in Iran, the subject of Chapter II, has been covered extensively in the West by a wealth of eminent scholars such as Hinz, Glassen, Mazzaoui, Schimmel and Savory, and it is upon the works of these and other erudite

individuals that I draw for the historical perspective. However, the chapter is not simply a re-hash of existing material but rather a fresh juxtapositioning of facts which yields a new view of a well-explored area of research.

The consolidation of Twelver Shi'ite externalism in the Safavid period constitutes Chapter III. Again I have availed myself of the standard secondary works on the period, narratives by European travellers to Iran during the Safavid era, and a number of primary works by Safavid authors. In this context, several hitherto neglected works have been used extensively. Dānishpaẕẖūh's *Fihrist*, for example, is a mine of information on Safavid writers and their works. Afandī's *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, a comprehensive biographical dictionary of mainly Safavid scholars, was of inestimable value in unearthing information about the externalist Twelver *fuqahā'* and their output. Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī's *Sih Aṣl* , the most important anti-externalist document of the Safavid era, also features prominently in this chapter.

For the biography of Majlisī, in Chapter IV, I have relied heavily on Ṭabarsī's *Fayḍ al-qudsī*, the only comprehensive account of the man's life and works that we have. *Fayḍ al-qudsī* appears to be an almost verbatim reworking of Āqā Aḥmad Kirmānshāhī's *Mir'āt al-aḥwāl*, which I have also consulted for information on the descendants of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. Other primary source material has been used, but none of it contains information that cannot be found in these two key works. Standard biographical dictionaries such as *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'*, *Lu'lu'at al-Bahrayn* and *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* have also been used; reference is made to these at the beginning of Chapter IV. Majlisī's own works have also been studied, as have those of his contemporaries who wrote about or against him. Again, Dānishpaẕẖūh's *Fihrist* proved invaluable in this respect.

Chapter V, on the doctrines of *intiẓār* and *raj'a*, depends almost entirely on Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār*, in particular volume XIII (vols. 51, 52 and 53 of the new, printed edition).

Chapter I

The concepts of *īmān, islām* and *'ilm*

1.1 Statement of the question

One of the essential theological questions, discussed at a very early time and upon which the schools of *fiqh* and *kalām* were divided concerns the concepts of *īmān* and *islām*, and whether there is a distinction between the two. The question was prompted originally by speculation over whether certain sins committed by Muslims would lead to their loss of belief (*īmān*) or their expulsion from the fold of Islam. The Murji'ites were particularly active in the debates which centred upon this question.[1]

That there is a difference between *īmān* and *islām* is a fact which, in the first half of this chapter, I will attempt to clarify with the aid of evidence from the Quran, the traditions (*aḥādīth*) — both Sunnite and Shi'ite — and various works of Quranic exegesis or *tafsīr*. The point I wish to make is not a theological one , designed to solve the kinds of problem raised by the Murji'ites and their contemporaries; rather, it is to show how a confusion of the two terms *mu'min* (believer) and *muslim*, and the general inability to distinguish between the two, have facilitated the rise in importance of the *faqīh* throughout the ages and played a crucial part in the limitation of the concept of knowledge in Islam to the domain of jurisprudence and, in modern times, politics and affairs of state. Furthermore,

the failure to recognise that there are basically two kinds of *islām* described by the Quran — the real and the nominal — and the fact that it is possible to be a Muslim without being a believer in the Quranic sense of the word have generated a sense of complacency amongst most Muslims with respect to their duties *vis-a-vis* the commands made by the Quran concerning knowledge and belief.

The process whereby a man comes to believe in a Creator starts, as far as the Quran is concerned, with the act of *tafakkur* (thought or deliberation). The Quran declares in no uncertain terms that the whole of the cosmos is, as it were, a great, open book which is to be pondered, understood and interpreted. It also says that those among mankind who posess intelligence, insight, understanding, discernment and knowledge will ultimately be able to know the meaning of the 'Book of Creation', for the cosmos is replete with 'signs' (*āyāt*) which point to its Creator: the cosmos 'speaks' to man as a revelation of God.[2] The cosmos has a meaning over and above itself: knowledge about the cosmos is of use only if it leads man to the realisation that there is a Creator. At this point — or rather at every point of realisation — man may submit to the knowledge he has obtained or choose to ignore or cover (*kafara*) it and deny the divine origin of the cosmos.[3] If he does submit to the knowledge he has acquired concerning the Creator of the cosmos, he has entered the initial stages of *islām* (submission). The logical outcome of this initial stage of submission is adherence to the commands of the Creator, which manifest themselves in the code of social, economic and political regulations known as the Islamic *sharī'a* . Personal acts of obedience such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving etc. are an integral part of this code: one

who adheres to these regulations is known as a Muslim, and is accepted as a member of the Islamic community (*umma*). There are, thus, two basic stages of submission, one which is internal and concerns *īmān* ; and one which is external and concerns the outward display of obedience. As I shall attempt to show, the Quran declares that it is possible to submit externally without submitting internally, which means that whoever is born into an Islamic community cannot assume that he is automatically a believer simply because his parents and culture are Islamic. It is not the concern of this thesis to prove whether or not Muslims are true believers in their own revelation; the point I wish to make here is that there does exist a very clear difference between, firstly, *īmān* and *islām* , and secondly between submission to God (*islām*) and submission to God's rules (Islam). That there exists a huge majority for whom Islam in its external sense is automatically equatable with the internal act of belief and submission referred to as *islām* is admitted by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike.[4] What is generally overlooked is the fact that this tendency to ignore, or inability to recognise, the difference between *īmān* and the two types of *islām* has effectively shifted the focus from the fundamentals of the faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*) to the secondary principles (*furu' al-dīn*): since *īmān* is internal and cannot be gauged by others it is overshadowed by Islam, which is external and governed by a code of rules and regulations, the derivation, interpretation and implementation of which constitute a domain of highly specialized knowledge occupied by the *faqīh* or jurisprudent. In actual fact, the Quran affirms that belief may increase or decrease; however when belief is equated with Islam, the fact that a believer's *īmān* is either on the increase or

the decrease tends to be ignored: since Islam is static, *īmān* is also understood to be static. As a result, the commands in the Quran which exhort the believers to check themselves and their belief constantly are overlooked or misinterpreted. Consequently, the concept of *da'wa* or 'calling to belief' is focused erroneously on non-believers outside the Islamic community; within the Islamic community itself, the lion's share of Islamic teaching is taken by the *faqīh*, who instructs the people in Islam but not in *īmān*. According to the Malaysian scholar Naquib al-Attas, confusion and error concerning the concept of knowledge among Muslims has led to the rise of false leaders in all spheres of life, particularly in the fields of knowledge which are not obligatory (*farḍ al-'ayn*).al-Attas says:

> The rise of false leaders in all spheres of life which follows from loss of *adab* and confusion and error in knowledge respectively means in this particular case the rise of false *'ulamā'* who restrict knowledge (*al-'ilm*) to the domain of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). They are not worthy followers of the *mujtahidūn*..... they are not men of keen intelligence and profound insight, nor are they men of integrity in keeping the trust of right spiritual leadership. Notwithstanding the fact that the Holy Quran repeatedly condemns it, they delight in endless controversy, disputations and polemics which succeed only in making mountains out of jurisprudential molehills in whose blind paths the generality of Muslims are left guideless and bewildered.[5]

Confusion in belief, says al-Attas, stems from ignorance of *tawḥīd* and the fundamental articles of faith and other related essentials of belief. As a result, inordinate attention is lavished upon the category of knowledge known as *farḍ al-kifāya*,[6] i.e. the secondary principles which on the individual level relate to

matters of personal conduct and on the social level to the problems of state and society. Ignorance of *tawḥīd*, which is facilitated by the assumption that a Muslim must automatically be a believer, and over-emphasis on the secondary branches of knowledge (*furūʿ*) pave the way for the ascendence of the *faqīh*; the fact that the word *ʿilm* as used in the Quran is open to interpretation further enables the *faqīh* to strengthen his position by conveniently 'limiting' knowledge to the domain of jurisprudence.

Thus it is that the question of differentiation between *īmān* and *islām* (submission) and Islam, plus the relationship between this and the concept of knowledge in Islam, must be understood if one is to perceive why it is that the *faqīh* has, from among all divisions of Muslim scholars, been able to gain the upper hand in the world of Islamic learning, especially in the context of Twelver Shi'ism and Twelver Shi'ite Iran.

1.2 The concepts of *īmān* and *islām* as presented in the Quran

īmān is the verbal noun of the fourth form of the root *āmana* which connotes trust, loyalty and security. The fourth form has the double meaning of to believe and to protect or place in safety.

There are over five hundred and seventy references in the Quran to words which are derived from the root *āmana*. Of these, almost half describe 'those who believe.' The most superficial study of the Quran reveals that the derivatives of the root *āmana* preponderate to an overwhelming degree over the derivatives of the root *aslama*, to submit. That belief and submission are different is clear; the

constant use of the word 'belief' or 'believers' would suggest quite conclusively that *īmān* is the most crucial element in a believer's make-up. Hundreds of verses in the Quran contain counsels of wisdom, commandments or admonitions beginning with the phrase "O ye who believe!" The definition of a believer – one who has *īmān* – can be found in many verses in the Quran.

The principal requisite of belief is that the individual should attain to a state of perception and reflection in which he sees all the world not as 'natural' phenomena but as signs or *āyāt* of God. All 'natural' phenomena are deemed by the Quran to point to Him.[7] The word *āyāt* denotes not only the verses of the Quran but also the material constituents of the cosmos. Intellect is the prerequisite of belief: intellect has to be applied to the signs in order for belief to obtain. Verse 29:35, for instance, cites the destruction of those who defied the prophet Lot as a 'sign for those who have understanding.' [8] According to the Iranian scholar and politician, Sayyid 'Ali Ḥusayni Khāmini'ī, *īmān* is something 'without which all actions and efforts are fruitless and ultimately futile.' [9] As for the role of the intellect and reason in belief, he says that:

> Belief must be the result of a conscious choice and the use of personal awareness and understanding, not the result of blind acceptance and imitation (*taqlīd*).It is thus that true believers can be differentiated from the masses, whose belief is generally worthless and without substance.[10]

Belief is primarily in five — or, according to some, six — things: God,

prophethood, angels, the revealed Books, the last Day, and Divine Decree and Determination(*qaḍā' wa qadar*).[11] Believers are those who, when God is mentioned, 'feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened and put all their trust in their Lord .' [12]

The word *zāda* ,translated here as 'strengthened', connotes the idea of increase; from this verse it may be understood that belief may increase or decrease, and that fluctuations in belief depend on the individual's reaction to the aforementioned 'rehearsal of signs' (*tilāwat al-āyāt*). Indeed, verse 8:4 confirms that there are degrees of belief.[13] In verse 9:124, the constant revelation of new aspects of God's truth is cited as a reason for the increase in faith of the believers. Since belief is connected to deliberation and intellectual contemplation of the 'signs', and since the revelation of signs is deemed to be constant,[14] it would appear that the only way a believer can retain and increase his belief is through constant awareness, deliberation and remembrance.[15] In verse 4:136, the believers are exhorted to believe in God, a command that would be meaningless were belief incable of increase and decrease.[16] Therefore, the prerequisites of belief — namely deliberation upon the *āyāt*, selective use of *'aql* or reason, remembrance of the Creator — must be at hand constantly if belief is to be increased. Belief cannot, on these terms, be static: the Hanafite stance which holds that there is no increase or decrease in belief must therefore be understood not in terms of quality of belief but in terms of the quantity of principles or items that are to be believed in. Even though some schools include 'acts of righteousness' within belief, it is clear that the concept of *īmān* is fundamentally different from the acts that it engenders: *īmān*, according

to the Quran, can increase or decrease; the obligatory number of prayers, or days of fasting, or amount of *zakāt* etc. can not. Thus the emphasis of the Quran is upon the inner state of belief and not upon the external acts of obedience.The Quran does, quite undertandably, stress the importance of 'acts of righteousness', but even the most cursory study of the verses shows that the Quran's pre-occupation with topics related to *īmān* far outweighs its commands to pray, fast, pay *zakāt* etc.[17] A famous Prophetic tradition asserts that an hour's contemplation (*tafakkur*) is better than a year's worship, i.e. with the word 'worship' (*'ibāda*) being taken to mean the external acts of devotion such as prayer and fasting. This is not to imply that the devotional acts are worthless; on the contrary, in verses such as 9:71, acts such as prayers, the giving of alms, enjoining that which is good and forbidding that which is bad etc. are included within the definition of true belief. The verse in question acknowledges the value of acts but puts emphasis on the *īmān* which must underlie those acts; the Quran quite clearly affirms the fact that it is belief which enjoys priority, and that actions are meaningful only if they are based on, and motivated by, a foundation of belief.[18] From the numerous counsels of wisdom and admonition that begin with the phrase "O ye who believe!", it becomes clear that the Islamic revelation as a source of guidance and education for its followers approaches those followers principally in terms of belief.

1.2.1 The term *islām* as used in the Quran

The term *islām* is the verbal noun of the fourth form Arabic verb *aslama*, which means literally to commit or resign oneself, to submit to the will of God.[19]

The first form verb *salima*, from which *aslama* is derived, connotes security and peace; consequently, one who submits his will to that of God is supposed to enter a state of security and peacefulness. Further derived from this root is the word *salām*, used as a ritual greeting between Muslims.

The word *salām* may have been one of the first signs of reference to the communal faith of Islam - a badge, as it were, denoting the status of the individual. The Quran itself alludes to this: in verse 4:94, Muḥammad and his companions are instructed not to accuse those who offer the customary salutation i.e. (*salām ʻalaykum*) of being unbelievers, but rather to investigate the matter carefully. The salutation, therefore, is a sign that the individual has made at least a verbal proclamation of submission.[20]

The Quran points consistently to a prefiguration of *islām* in the faith of the prophets who preceded Muḥammad. The words *muslim* and *ḥanīf* in this context are synonomous.[21] Verse 2:136 declares that there is no difference between the various prophets, and that the most salient common factor is their submission.[22] The common ground between Muslims and the 'people of the Book' (*ahl al-kitāb*) is that they are all *muslim*, bowing down their wills to God. Noah was commanded to bow down to God as a *muslim*;[23] the children of Abraham prayed to God to make them *muslim*,[24] and the children of Jacob tell their father on his deathbed that they will be *muslim* to the one God.[25] Joseph beseeches God to let him die as a *muslim* so that he can join the ranks of the blessed.[26] The disciples of Jesus declare their belief and submission, asking to 'bear witness that we are *muslim*.' [27]

In these and other verses the word *muslim* is used in a sense which clearly precedes its current meaning as one who believes in the particular religion of Muḥammad or one who is part of the Islamic community. It clearly means individual submission to God, the kind of submission that follows on from and complements *īmān*.

The word *islām* as a noun of action has, then , a double meaning: primarily — and originally — that of submission; secondly, adherence to the religion of Muḥammad. In Medina, Islam attained self-consciousness when it became a separate religion with its own laws and codes of personal and societal behaviour. The word Muslim was used to distinguish the members of the new community: it acquired a new meaning, distinct from the old one, which meant one who resigns himself to God. Although it is difficult to separate the technical and ordinary uses of the word *islām* in the Quran, it is obvious that two distinct connotations are intended. Verse 2:112, for example, describes a state in which the whole self is submitted. Yusuf Ali interprets this as the whole inner self and, since the notion of *iḥsān* is also mentioned, concludes that this *islām* must comprise *īmān* as well.[28] Given that the prophets and their followers before Muḥammad adhered to *islām*, it is clear that the word when used in this sense does not signify the particular codified religion of Islam. To contrast with this, verse 5:4 has Muḥammad declaring that he has 'chosen Islam for you as your religion';[29] this obviously refers to the outward profession of belief enshrined in the laws and codes of behaviour peculiar to him and his followers, i.e. Islam the communal religion rather than *islām* the individual submission of the whole inner self. This does not mean that *islām* and Islam are two wholly separate concepts. According to Sayyid Hasan Askari,

> Islam is the only religion which consciously chose a name for itself. It did not call itself the name of its founder, or community or country. Its self-naming was descriptive and normative of the essential nature of man, namely, that he has the potentiality to remember and realise his original destiny; that he can live in an active state of *islām*, of surrender to God. [30]

Thus according to the Quran, *islām* or personal surrender and submission to God should logically lead to Islam , or adherence to the laws and rules of behaviour as revealed by God through the medium of Muḥammad. One who has *īmān* should also have *islām*, and as a corollary, Islam.

While Islam denotes the adherence of a *muslim* to the Muslim community, the Quran tells of instances in which individuals claim to have submitted but, in actuality, have no real *īmān*. Their claim may be solely a verbal profession of faith, or it may be backed with the performance of certain acts of devotion such as prayer and fasting. The verse which demonstrates this situation most effectively is 49:14:

> 'The desert Arabs say: "We believe." Say: "Ye do not believe; only say that 'We have submitted,' for not yet has faith entered your hearts." '

The above verse is said to concern the tribe of Banū Asad, who came to profess Islam in the presence of Muḥammad in order to receive charity during a famine. The term 'submission' in this verse can thus mean only a verbal profession of adherence to Islam, and not the inner submission of the whole self that is understood from the majority of verses concerning *islām*.

The difference between *īmān* and *islām* will be delineated in full further on in this chapter; that the Quran accepts such a difference is clear from numerous verses, one of the most unambiguous being 2:208, in which the believers are instructed to enter wholeheartedly into *islām*.[31]

1.3 The difference between *īmān* and *islām*: the Sunnite viewpoint

According to the **Musnad** of Ibn Ḥanbal, 'Islam is external; faith belongs to the heart.' [32] The act of 'surrender to God' is, therefore, in this sense expressed by holding fast to the ritual observances prescribed by religious law. God alone judges men's hearts and thus the reality of belief: the judgement of men may concern itself with Islam. The 'science of *fiqh*' has been callled '*maqām al-Islām*' by the Sufis.[33]

Many Hanafites and Maturidites consider *islām* and *īmān* to be synonomous, yet define each of them separately as a verbal confession (*iqrār*), sometimes linking this with intimate adherence or with knowledge of the heart, or both. The second century (A.H.) work of Hanafite theology, **Fiqh al-akbar** and the third century **Waṣiyyat Abī Ḥanīfa** ignore the question altogether. The **Fiqh-i Akbar II** draws a distinction: *islām* is equated with total surrender (*taslīm*) and total obedience (*inqiyād*) to the divine laws. According to this text, 'there is no faith without Islam and Islam without faith cannot be found.' [34]

The Ash'arites and Shafi'ites make a distinction between *īmān* and *islām*. al-Ash'arī, for example, identifies *islām* with the two constituent parts of the *shahāda*, in other words with the verbal testimony which grants admission to the

community of the Prophet,[35] and concludes that *islām* is diffferent from *īmān*. In the **Ibāna**, it is stated that *islām* is wider than belief; accordingly, 'all *islām* is not faith.' [36] The late Ash'arites were able to claim that Islam, the observance of the prescriptions ordained by law, and above all the explicit profession of the *shahāda*, can be practised without belief, and that belief (*taṣdīq*) can exist without Islam. But Islam without belief is the way of the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*); belief without Islam need not be culpable, in the event of some external obstacle, although it would be if the testimony to Islam were not given through half-heartedness or weakness.It would then be a question of *fisq* (prevarication resulting from sin) rather than unbelief. al-Jurjānī, a Shafi'ite, says that 'Islam is the verbal profession of faith without the agreement of the heart, while faith is the agreement of the heart and the tongue.' [37]

For Ibn Taymiyya, Islam is the 'external and, so to speak, social application of the law,' and ' *īmān* is the interiorization of Islam.' [38] Since it is the external and social application of the law which is the binding force of the ideal Islamic society, it is with this Islam that the jurists are concerned. Wherever the Quranic prescriptions are observed communally, there Islam will be. The point of first importance for the jurist who is studying and formulating the statutes and laws of the *bilād al-Islām* is not so much *īmān* but rather the communal observance of those prescriptions which make up Islam. Thus a synonym of *dār al-Islām* was to be *dār al-'adl*, where the rights of men ordained by the Quran are observed and protected. Anyone who describes himself as a Muslim means to affirm thereby not so much his care for the practice and personal observences as for adherence to a

commmunity of those who acknowledge the Quran and Muḥammad.[39]

1.3.1 The term *islām* in the *tafsīr* literature

Whereas *īmān* is used generally as an expression of the internal response to and affirmation of God's revelation to man, the term *islām* possesses an inherent flexibility that allows it to encompass diversity and often extremes of understanding within the expressions of a single writer. That there exists a clear distinction between the communal and personal aspects of the term *islām* is obvious from the verses of the Quran. The much cited 'Banū Asad ' verse (49:14) shows that *īmān* is to be distinguished from *islām*; another important point which emerges from this verse is that *islām* itself may be seen from two different angles: the wholehearted, personal submission of the individual — an integral part of belief — and the communal expression of submission known universally as the religion of Islam. According to Kenneth Cragg,

> There is the general and the specific; the idea and its definitive expression;the thing itself and the thing in its 'institution'. Islam organises *islām*, enshrines it and defines it.[40]

Theoretically, then, the Islamic community consists of individuals who have come to believe in God and submitted themselves to Him.For the average Muslim, these two aspects — the personal and the communal — have been traditionally indistinguishible, even though the distinction is clear when one compares the Banū Asad verse in which the submission referred to is both communal and, more impor-

tantly, strictly nominal, with verses such as 2:112, in which the idea of submission is that of the whole self.[41] Likewise, verse 4:94 concerns the possibility of nominal submission, represented in this case by the symbolic salutation (*salām*) offered by one Muslim to another, whereas verse 31:22, for instance, refers to the submission of the whole inner self, plus *iḥsān* or the unselfish worship of God.[42]

An individual who submits his inner self totally to the will of God is, by definition, a *muslim*: the logical corollary of his act of submission will be an outward and external display of faith that will instate him automatically as a member of the community of Islam. If *islām* is personal and Islam communal, then he will be both *muslim* and Muslim.[43] This position is similar to statements in formal logic such as "All Frenchmen are Europeans but not all Europeans are Frenchmen." All *muslims* are Muslims, but not all Muslims are *muslims*. The indistinguishibility of the two aspects of the term in the minds of the majority of the Muslim masses may be a reflection of the fact that in the very early days of Islam it may have indeed been possible to assert that all Muslims were also *muslims*, for the simple reason that it was only through the union of *muslims* that the first Muslim community was able to come into existence. Furthermore, the era of Muḥammad and his companions is idealized by Muslims in general as the 'ideal age' or 'age of felicity' (*aṣr al-sa'āda*), in which Muḥammad 'perfected the religion.' [44] It is possible, then, that the desire to preserve the concept of an ideal age and an exemplary Islamic community actually prevented the earlier exegetes not only from drawing a clear distinction between the personal and communal aspects of the term *islām* but also from freely admitting the possibility that an individual may be Muslim but not

muslim.

However, changes of understanding *vis-a-vis* the term *islām* do appear to have taken place; this much can be discerned from a comparative study of Quranic works of *tafsīr.*

For Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī, *islām* must always constitute a matter for the heart; if not, it cannot be called *islām.* As such, *islām* becomes coterminous with *īmān.* al-Rāzī agrees that while *īmān* and *islām* are different in generality, they are one in existence.[45] Rashīd Riḍā offers a similar interpretation when he says that both *īmān* and *islām* are considered to constitute specialized belief (*īmān khāṣṣ*), the only religion (*dīn*) acceptable to God, and the only means for human salvation.[46] For other exegetes, both Shi'ite and Sunnite, *islām* is part of *īmān* and constitutes one element in the acceptance and confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), whereby man proclaims his sincere belief in the unity (*aḥadiyya*) and unicity (*wāḥidiyya*) of God and incorporates into his own existence and world-view the integrity that is based on the Divine Unity. Here, *īmān* precedes submission (*islām*), forming the two basic initial steps of a process of belief that is mentioned time and time again in the Quran: *īmān* always precedes *islām*, good deeds (*a'māl ṣāliḥa*), emigration (*hijra*) etc.[47] Many other exegetes do understand a basic difference between *īmān* and *islām*, admitting that *islām* can have a purely external meaning while *īmān* refers to the internal belief in, and confirmation of, the Divine Unity and all of the sacred truths that recognition of the Divine Unity brings into focus. When the term *islām* is isolated, it can be seen as both the ex-

pression of individual submission to the will of God and as the name of the group of those who have submitted. The American orientalist Jane Smith describes the aspect of individual submission as a 'vertical relationship' between the Creator and the created, and the aspect of communal submission as a 'horizontal relationship' between the individual and the community.[48] This understanding misses one important point, however, since it ignores the fact that there are two definitions of *islām*: the true state of inner submission (*islām*), and the adherence — be it as a logical corollory of *islām* or purely in name only — to the external rites and rituals that comprise the religion of the community (Islam).

Historically, writers have used the form Islam when referring to the historical Muslim community with its objectification and systematization of beliefs and ritual practices. This usage generally masks the fact that the term also denotes personal submission, with which Western orientalists are most concerned when attempting to analyse and define *islām*.

In the early *tafsīr* literature, the apparent intention is the 'unified' meaning of *islām* as both individial submission and plural condition. Ibn 'Abbās, one of the earliest recorded exegetes and accepted by Sunnites and Shi'ites alike, states clearly that *islām* signifies *tawḥīd* (Divine Unity, or rather the acceptance thereof), yet also declares that one can be born into *islām*/Islam. In his interpretation of verse 3:83, he claims that the word *ṭaw' ^{an}* (willingly) indicates those who are born into *islām*/Islam, and *karh^{an}* those who 'enter *al-islām* by the sword.'[49] Thus there seems to have been no conscious or intellectual distinction made by

the earlier exegetes between the individual responsibility to carry out the specific commandments of God and the fact that these regulations are incumbent on all of the members of the community and thus characterize that group itself.

In the exegesis of al-Ṭabarī, another stage in the understanding of *islām* may be discerned: the purely verbal — and thus necessarily external — submission by which the individual enters the community (*milla*) of Islam. This is not of the same depth as *īmān*, which involves knowledge (*'ilm*) and affirmation within the heart of the individual (*taṣdīq bi'l qalb*). However, this *īmān* is coordinate with the deeper *islām*, which in turn is nothing but the perfection of belief (*takmīl al-īmān*); as such it constitutes the total surrender of the heart, mind and body. In other words, it is the emotional response which leads to the physical acts of obedience. al-Ṭabarī cites the much-quoted Banū Asad verse (49:14) as an example of how one enters *millat al-islām*, whereby one becomes Muslim but not necessarily *muslim* or *mu'min.*[50]

Other exegetes did not seem to see the need to make such a clear distinction, leaving it open as to whether the *dīn* to which they refer is the personal *islām* of the individual or the communal state of the followers of Muḥammad. Early discussions tended to centre upon the cicumstances of Muḥammad's time and thus it is not surprising that their interpretation of the term *islām* reflected this 'unified' understanding of its individual and communal aspects. The focal point of their discussions is the Muslim community at the time of the Prophet. al-Ṭūṣī, for instance, talks about the entry of all Arabs into *islām* at the time of the Prophet, but

fails to throw any light on the condition of the Muslim community of his own era. Such *tafsīr* works deal almost exclusively with the 'reasons for revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and interpret verses for the most part with reference to the events that occurred during the twenty-three years of Quranic revelation. Although the earlier exegetes do not allow themselves room for speculation (which is more germane to the particular type of Quranic interpretation known as *ta'wīl*), modern Quranic commentators do discuss their own times and circumstances. Rashīd Riḍā, for instance, attacks what he sees as the ethnocentricity (*jinsiyya*) of modern Muslims:

> For *al-dīn*, if it is not the true *islām* (i.e. submission) is nothing but codified formalities (*rasm*) and uncritical acceptance (*taqlīd*) which people adopt as a bond for ethnic identity (*jinsiyya*), an instrument of partisanship, and a means for worldly gain. This kind of *islām* increases the soul in evil and the hearts in corruption.[51]

As for the word *al-dīn* and its plural *adyān*, these became standard from the fifth century as in the interpretation of verses such as 61:7-9, in which *al-islām* is to be proclaimed over all religions. The interpretations of *dīn* and Islam are closely intertwined. It appears most likely that the Quranic exegetes intended a contrast between the religion of Islam and other religious communities when they used the term *adyān*, even though the word used in 61:9 is singular and could easily mean the response of individuals rather than the plurality of religious systems.[52] The Quranic promise that *dīn al-islām* would be victorious over all other religions can easily be understood in terms of social and political dominance at a time when the Islamic state was clearly in a position of flourishing power.

Therefore, several developments in the understanding of *islām* on the 'horizontal plane' of the the relationship between individual and community can be discerned. It would appear that during the formative years of Quranic exegesis, the perception of *islām* as both personal submission and communal adherence — without a distinction made between the two — was simply another expression of unity. Then there follows the stage in which it appears that a form of self-conscious definition took the place of the earlier unconscious or automatic amalgamation of the two elements in one term: *islām* came to be clearly defined in terms of personal response and individual submission to the will and dictates of God. Gradually, indications of a more reified understanding of *islām* as a *dīn* or religion (Islam) appeared.

In the modern works of Quranic exegesis, things are quite different; we now begin to find specific reference to *islām* as something distinct from personal submission. Rashīd Riḍā contrasts what he calls 'real *islām*' (*al-islām al-ḥaqīqī*) with habitual or conventional (*'urfī*) Islam, indicating that it is the association by ethnic identity with the religion of one's nationality or culture that can actually militate against and prevent true submission to the will of God.[53]

Interpretations such as that of Rashīd Riḍā represent a shift from the unity of individual submission and group identity to a firm distinction between the two. As stated previously, this distinction is highlighted in several verses of the Quran; for reasons already indicated, the true connotations of this distinction were masked by what was most likely a desire on the part of the exegetes to preserve unity. Ibn

'Abbās talked about being born into *islām*/Islam yet did not indicate in what sense this differs from the *islām* of personal submission. Rashīd Riḍā on the other hand expressly contrasts *al-islām al-jinsī* with *al-islām al-ḥaqīqī*. There is one sense in which Riḍā does intend the unity of two meanings in one term: this is in his vision of an ideal society in which all members are freed from purely communal affiliations to the point where they are able to experience true personal *islām*. Whereas the unity expressed by earlier generations was of the individual and the actual, here it is of the individual and the ideal, i.e. what was, as opposed to what could be.

Thus for the traditional Quranic commentators, the term *islām* is used both as the individual act of submission and as the generic name for the community of those who have (in theory) submitted, with greater emphasis — as in the Quran — on the first element. There is no reference in the early literature to the 'ideal', only to the 'actual'. For the modern exegetes, true *islām* is the sincere submission of the individual and, ideally, the community, but it is *islām* in its real (*ḥaqīqī*) rather than its conventional (*'urfī*) sense that is required.

1.4 Twelver Shi'ite narrations

According to the sixth Shi'ite Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, *islām* is the verbal proclamation of the *shahādatayn*. In a tradition narrated by al-Mufaḍḍal, the Imam states that it is this proclamation which qualifies a man to be a member of the Muslim community: his blood (i.e. his life) becomes respected and protected; things may be entrusted unto him; he can enter into marriage with a Muslim woman, etc. However, the rewards to be had in the hereafter stem from

īmān (*al-thawāb 'ala al-īmān*). In a similar tradition, al-Ṣādiq states that *īmān* is 'proclamation' (*iqrār*) along with actions (*a'māl*), whereas *islām* is proclamation without actions.[54] On the difference between *īmān* and *islām*, al-Ṣādiq says that *islām* is the ' external condition' (*al-wajh al-ẓāhirī*) by which Muslims are identified: this consists of the proclamation of the *shahādatayn* plus the performance of prayers, the giving of religious taxes (*zakāt*), fasting, pilgrimage etc. *Īmān*, on the other hand, is all of the above plus recognition of the concept of *wilāya*.[55] One who believes in the importance of prayer and fasting but does not recognise *wilāya* is a misguided Muslim. *Īmān* is that which involves the heart and thus leads man to God; *islām* consists of external words and actions. The word *wilāya* here is used in its Shi'ite sense; whether the narration is genuine or not is another question. As far as the Quran is concerned, the kind of *wilāya* understood by the Twelver Shi'ites does not constitute a pillar of belief; indeed there are even certain Twelver scholars who contradict the customary inclusion of *imāma* in the fundamentals of faith by declaring it to be a 'principle of *madhhab* rather than a principle of belief'.[56] The important fact which emerges from this tradition is that *īmān* and *islām* are perceived to be conceptually different, with *īmān* concerning the heart and thus forming the basis for Islam, which consists of all matters external and practical such as prayers and fasting and the like. The fifth Shi'ite Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, reiterates the above in a tradition which has it that it is *īmān* alone which can lead man to God: actions, obedience and submission to God are but confirmations of belief.[57] Islam comprises those external words and deeds which identify a man as one of a community of Muslims. Islam does not

require *īmān*, but *īmān* requires Islam. In this context, Islam and *īmān* may be likened to the *masjid al-ḥarām* and the *ka'ba*: the *ka'ba* is in the *masjid al-ḥarām*, but not all of the latter is in the former. With the *ka'ba* here representing *īmān*, the tradition is confirming that whoever has *īmān* will also have Islam, but not everyone who has Islam will have *īmān*. al-Bāqir at this point quotes verse 49:14, which deals with the opportunistically superficial submission of the Banū Asad tribe. The *mu'min* and the Muslim are on par as far as their special rights are concerned, but the *mu'min* is more exalted in the sight of God by virtue of the fact that his actions are based on true belief and not on blind imitation (*taqlīd*) or by force of geographical and cultural circumstance.[58]

In reply to a letter from one of his followers, al-Ṣādiq clarifies further the difference between *īmān* and *islām*: belief, he states, is the conviction (*'aqīda*) of the heart, coupled with a confession (*iqrār*) of this belief by the tongue, and also the implementation of the 'pillars of Islam' (i.e. prayers, fasting etc.).[59] Islam is an 'external matter'; it may be that a person becomes Muslim before he becomes a true believer, but no-one can become a true believer unless he becomes Muslim. al-Ṣādiq is confirming here that the crucial component is belief (*īmān*), and that it is possible to be a Muslim without actually being a believer. He then appears to confuse the issue by declaring that a person will not be a believer unless or until he becomes a Muslim. The ambiguity here stems from the fact that 'real' and 'nominal' *islām* cannot be differentiated in Arabic by giving the latter a capital I, as can be done in English. As shown, it is possible to adhere nominally to the religion of Islam and partake of all the benefits that membership of the Muslim

community brings but yet still remain without any true belief or firm conviction. Once again, the verse which deals with the superficial acceptance of Islam the religion by the Banū Asad is ample proof of this. However, al-Ṣādiq is correct when he asserts that a believer cannot actually be a believer unless he has made a total submission (*islām; taslīm*) to the truths in which he has come to believe. The tradition makes sense only if al-Ṣādiq has in mind the form of submission described as *islām* (i.e. with a small *i*); this *islām* may be seen as a perfection of *īmān* and, as such, part of the process of belief itself. It is the kind of submission which should logically lead to the performance of 'good deeds', the main elements of which are the 'pillars of Islam'. It is thus expected that a *muslim* also be a Muslim, but it is by no means a foregone conclusion that a Muslim will also be a *muslim*. (Here, the word *muslim* accords with *islām* and is used to denote true submission, whilst Muslim denotes an adherent — nominal or actual — of the religion of Islam). al-Ṣādiq concludes the narration by saying that Islam precedes *īmān* and constitutes the preliminary to belief. If someone commits a sin — big or small — he leaves the state of *īmān* but does not leave the state of Islam. If he repents and asks for forgiveness, he will re-enter the state of *īmān*. He will not be considered an unbeliever unless he declares that which is illicit to be licit, and vice-versa: in this case he will leave *īmān* and Islam altogether. This person, according to the tradition, is like one who first enters the *ḥaram* and the *ka'ba*, but then commits a crime and is thrown out of both and then executed.

1.5 Shi'ite exegesis: a contemporary view of the question of *īmān* and *islām*

According to 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *islām* can be defined in several ways and can be seen to operate on several levels. The lowest level of *islām*, or submission, consists of the 'acceptance of the externals', by which may be understood the commands and prohibitions of the religion (*dīn*) of Islam. These are affirmed by declaration of the *shahādatayn*, the act of witnessing which takes place when an individual accepts Islam as his religion. It is this spoken formula which admits one into the fold of Islam and secures membership of the community of Muslims, 'whether or not the heart confirms the tongue.' [60] To support his assertion that the act of witnessing which renders the individual a Muslim may take place with little or no inner conviction, the 'Allāma cites the already mentioned verse which describes the nominal entrance into Islam of the Banū Asad tribe.

The first stage of *īmān* then follows: this comprises affirmation (*taṣdīq*) by the heart of the concepts enshrined in the *shahādatayn* in what the 'Allāma terms a general (*ijmālī*) manner. At this stage most of the subsidiary (*far'ī*) commands of the religion are translated into practice. This heralds the second stage of *islām*, wherein the heart 'submits to most of the truths in a deep and comprehensive (*tafṣīlī*) manner.' [61] This stage of submission also engenders acts of righteousness (*a'māl ṣāliḥa*), although there may still be faults in the believer and instances in which he strays from the path and commits sins. In order to confirm the existence of a stage of *islām* which comes after the initial stage of *īmān*, and which is different to the nominal submission represented in the verse

concerning the Banū Asad, the 'Allāma quotes two other verses, 43:69 and2:208: the first is one of the verses in which belief in the signs (*āyāt*) of God is stated categorically as preceding submission to God's will;[62] the second is a command from God to the believers to enter into *islām* wholeheartedly.[63]

After the second stage of *islām* comes the second stage of *īmān*. This consists of deep belief (*al-īmān al-tafṣīlī*) in all of the truths of Islam. For the 'Allāma, this state is expessed in such verses as 49:15, in which the believers are described as those who have believed in God and His messenger and have never since doubted.[64] Also cited is verse 61:11, in which the believers are told to strengthen their belief in God and His prophet and to strive in His cause.[65] The third stage of *islām* now follows. Having progressed so far, the individual will be able to submit all of his animal appetites, all of those facets of his make-up which are inclined to ephemeral pleasures and worldly allurements, to the will of the Creator. Influenced by his belief, he will begin to worship God as though he were seeing Him.[66] In both his internal and external senses, he will see nothing that is not submitted to its Creator and to the dictates of 'divine decree and determination' (*qaḍā' wa qadar*). The 'Allāma refers to verse 4:65, in which it is stated that real belief can obtain only when there is the fulllest conviction on the part of the believer, and when no resistance is offered against the decisions of God.[67] Thereupon follows the third stage of *īmān*, crystallized — according to the 'Allāma — in verses 1-11 of the *sūra* al-Mu'minūn (The Believers). The second and third stages of *islām* are virtually identical since both are characterized by their insistence on submission to the commands of God, which is in turn facilitated

by *riḍā* (contentment in the face of whatever God decrees), *ṣabr* (patience), and sincerely motivated acts of righteousness. When a man reaches the third stage of *islām* he has become transmogrified into a totally obedient slave of God, yet it is clear that the mastership of God over His creation is far more meaningful than can be understood from the conventional master-slave relationships obtaining in the human realm. God's ownership, asserts the 'Allāma, is absolute: man is totally dependent upon the Creator for all things and can exercise no independent power or authority over his own essence, attributes or actions. Thus God's power and dominicality cannot be compared with the authority of a human master over his human slave. As man's submission increases, God gradually reveals the reality of the Creator-creature relationship to man. This act of revealing is purely a 'gift of grace' from God: man has no power over the act of revealing and cannot consciously work towards obtaining this gift. The 'Allāma quotes verses concerning the prophet Abraham, who, although having accepted God's legislative (*tashrī'ī*) command to submit, asked at the end of his life for 'submission' for himself and his family.[68] Since submission is something which, logically, is initiated by the believer, Abraham's plea points to something which was out of his own hands. This is what the 'Allāma refers to as the fourth stage of *islām*; yet it apppears more likely that Abraham's petition was not for a vision in which God's absolute ownership would be revealed but for the safeguarding of the submission he had already made. The 'Allāma's claim that this stage of submission is a gift from God does not fit in with the understanding of submission as a state which is consciously initiated by the believer. Furthermore, Abraham could have had no clear insight into the level of

his family's belief or their eligibility for the kind of vision described by the 'Allāma.

The fourth stage of *īmān* entails the total application of all of the above to all of the situations in which the believer finds himself. Verses 10:62-4 are cited as a demonstration of this stage of *īmān*, wherein the believers are aware of their total dependence upon God and realise that no cause can have an effect without the permission of the Creator. This is the stage of *wilāya*, in which the believer is raised to the exalted status of 'friend of God' (*walī Allāh*).

From the cursory study of narrations and Quranic exegesis, several facts emerge. Firstly, that *īmān* and *islām* are conceptually different is, in the Shi'ite as in the Sunnnite view, quite plain from several Quranic verses. Secondly, the fact that *īmān* is the basis for *islām*/Islam and thus totally fundamental is also a matter for agreement between various Shi'ite and Sunnnite scholars, past and present.

There is considerable confusion, however, surrounding the different interpretations of the word *islām*, and the inability — or unwillingness — on the part of certain earlier exegetes to make, as the Quran does, a distinction between personal submission (*islām*) and membership of the communal religion (Islam). As we have seen, this may have been the result of a desire to preserve unity, or a reflection of the belief that in the very earliest Islamic community, all Muslims were also *muslims*. As the community expanded, the possibility that people would profess adherence to the faith purely for the social and material benefits that membership of the community would bestow upon them increased. The case of the Banū

Asad is but one example.[69] In addition, the ambiguity in the use of the word *islām*, which in Arabic cannot be differentiated from the word Islam by the use of capitals as it can in English, tended to blur the distinction between the interior, personal submission of the individual *islām* and the formal profession of adherence to the religious community (Islam). Equivocal statements such as those made by Ibn 'Abbās give the impression that *islām* is a question more of birthright than of personal and individual submission.[70] Equally misleading is the tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in which belief is deemed possible only through *islām*. While this may be the case if, by the word *islām*, the personal submission of the individual is intended, it is not true as far as Islam is concerned. In this light, it is not difficult to understand why an individual born into an Islamic environment may consider himself to be a believer merely through affiliation to the Muslim community, and thus, by equating Islam with *īmān*, shift the emphasis that should, according to the Quran, be on the latter to the former. Thus by the 6th/12th century, al-Ghazālī was able to berate the Muslim community on the grounds that 'the science of the path of the hereafter, which our forefathers trod and which includes what God calls in His Book law, wisdom, knowledge, enlightenment, light, guidance, and righteousness, has vanished from among men and been completely forgotten.'[71] And by the 20th century, exegetes such as Rashīd Riḍā were able to discount the beliefs of countless fellow Muslims as 'an instrument of partisanship and a means of worldly gain.'[72]

Given that both *īmān* and *islām*/Islam are supposed to involve a conscious choice[73] — and, by implication, knowledge and reason — on the part of the indi-

vidual, to what extent has the preponderance of Islam over *īmān* affected the way in which the Islamic revelation has been, and is still being, communicated to the masses by Muslim scholars? It is to the question of knowledge or *'ilm* that we now turn.

1.6 The terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'*

There have been countless expositions on the nature and function of knowledge (*'ilm*) in Islam — more so than in any other religion — and this is no doubt because of the pre-eminent position and crucial role accorded to knowledge in the Quran.[74] These expositions, though varied in substance, encompass the nature of knowledge in its entirety. There have been distinctions made between the knowledge of God (*'ilm Allāh*) and the knowledge of man about God (*'ilm bi'llāh*), and religion, and the world, and things sensible and intelligible; and about spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Thus, for example, *'ilm* has been understood to mean various things: the received revelation or Quran; the revealed law (*sharī'a*); the *sunna*; Islam; *īmān*; spiritual knowledge (*'ilm al-ladunnī*); wisdom (*ḥikma*); gnosis (*'irfān*); thought (*tafakkur*); science (to which the plural *'ulūm* is applied); and education. Works have been produced on these themes from the very beginning of Islam up until the present day, although the bulk of these writings emerged before the tenth century AH. Such works include exegeses on the Quran, commentaries on the traditions of the Prophet by compilers of the various *ḥadīth* collections; works on law and jurisprudence, and those of other foremost jurists concerned specifically with the elucidation of knowledge and discernment; books on knowledge written by

various scholars, savants, sages and imams among both the Sunnites and Shi'ites; treatises by the Mu'tazilites, the theologians, the philosophers and the Sufis; lexicons and dictionaries of technical terminologies in *taṣawwuf* and philosophy and the arts and sciences (*al-funūn*) by various grammarians, philologists, scholars and men of letters; and in anthologies and other works connected with education and *belles-lettres*. Obviously a comprehensive survey of the the literature dealing with the Islamic understanding of the concept of *'ilm* is a monumental task, far beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore the present work is not concerned with the philosophical or epistemological definition of knowledge;[75] rather, the aim here is to show, via a cursory overview of how *'ilm* is presented in the Quran and traditions, that the term has for the most part been stripped of its original meaning. The multiplicity of meanings that the word *'ilm* inspires has had far-reaching consequences for the Muslim masses, not only in the way in which they are guided 'religiously' but also as far as political authority is concerned.

The development of disciplines such as the interpretation of the Quran and the traditions, and the method of application of social, economic and political laws derived from those two sources, was inevitable considering the nature of the Islamic revelation and the practical demands of the Islamic community founded in Medina under the leadership of Muḥammad. Interpretation of the Quran was one of the earliest branches of learning to come into existence. The Iranian scholar and cleric 'Abd al-Riḍā Ḥijāzī is of the opinion that during the life time of Muḥammad, there was no need for books or writings dealing with the 'Quranic sciences', since anyone who had any questions concerning the Quran and its interpretation had only to

ask the Prophet himself.[76] The Quranic 'sciences' (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*) developed rapidly after the death of Muḥammad, with many disciplines coming into existence. The importance attached by the Quran to the acquisition of knowledge, together with the apparent ambiguity of the term *'ilm* itself, gave rise to a wide range of 'sciences', each one of which is deemed to be traceable to the Quran itself. Each of the intellectually-oriented members of the community would, according to his personal ability or preference, busy himself with a certain aspect of the revelation. The Prophet's son-in-law, 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib — the first Shi'ite Imam — is said to have been the first person to teach the correct pronunciation and method of recitation of the Quran; this he did by clarifying the rules of Arabic grammar and teaching them to one Abū al- Aswad al-Du'ulī.[77] It is also claimed that the famous exegete Ibn 'Abbās was instructed in the science of exegesis by 'Alī when the latter was Caliph.[78] The Iranian cleric, 'Allāma Burqa'ī, traces all branches of what he calls 'Islamic science' back to the Quran, and outlines briefly the various aspects of the Quran which were focused upon and the disciplines which such attention engendered. Interest in the actual letters and sounds of the revealed words, he says, brought into existence the 'science' of recitation (*'ilm al-tajwīd*), i.e. reading the Quran in accordance with established rules of pronunciation and intonation; some individuals focused on the usage and positioning of words, thus creating the 'science' of grammar and syntax (*'ilm-i ṣarf wa naḥw*); contemplation upon the various styles of writing and copying the Quran led to the flourishing of Islamic calligraphy (*'ilm-i rasm al-khaṭṭ*); those who pondered the possible meanings of words and phrases paved ther way for the 'science' of exegesis (*'ilm al-tafsīr*);

those who focused their attention on rational proofs and examples of Divine Unity heralded the foundation of the 'science' of theology (*'ilm al-kalām*); investigation into how rules and regulations necessary for the functioning of social life can be extracted or deduced from the verses of the Quran led to the birth of the 'science of principles' (*'ilm al-uṣūl*), i.e. the principles of Islamic jurisprudence; contemplation on the lives and achievements of the prophets engendered the 'science' of history (*'ilm al-tārīkh*); the study of those verses in which the Quran discusses the kinds of behaviour that lead to either reward or punishment in the hereafter brought into being the 'science' of ethics and morality (*'ilm al-akhlāq*); those who deliberated upon the numerous Quranic verses which deal with cosmic phenomena founded the 'natural' sciences and became pioneers in the fields of physics, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, alchemy, geography etc.[79] Burqa'ī's list of what he terms 'Quranic sciences' is extensive; he points out that all of the progress made by Muslim scholars in their various fields in the first centuries of Islam happened as a result of the Islamic revelation and the emphasis therein on the acquisition of *'ilm*.[80]

The development of the above branches of knowledge did not take place all at once; indeed, the formation of each discipline happened gradually, each in accordance with the practical needs of the burgeoning Islamic community. For example, the earliest activity — and most highly developed expression — of the Islamic community in its foetal stages was in law rather than in theology; the practical demands of the community necessitated the stabilization and standardization of the processes of law long before the need was felt for a formal discipline of the-

ological speculation such as *kalām*.[81] This is not to say that metaphysical matters were not discussed in the early days of Islam; indeed, most of the Meccan verses are replete with matters metaphysical, and it is inconceivable that such questions could have gone undiscussed between Muḥammad and the early converts to the new faith. The appearance of formally structured branches of Islamic knowledge or science took place much later than this. Inititally, anyone proficient in any of the aforementioned fields would, as 'one who knows', be entitled to be called an *'ālim* (possessor of knowledge) in his own discipline. Yet it appears that in the first few decades after the demise of Muḥammad, each scholar was titled according to his own particular field; 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, for instance, was, by virtue of his pioneering work in Quranic exegesis, called *ra'īs al-mufassirīn* (lit. chief of the exegetes).[82] It was not until later, when the various branches of knowledge had been structured into more formal disciplines of learning and instruction, that the nebulous term *'ulamā'* came to be used as a blanket expression to cover any group of Muslim scholars, regardless of their speciality. The apparent ambiguity of the term *'ilm* as used in the Quran left the way open for each group of scholars to insist on the necessity of acquiring that particular branch of knowledge which happened to be its speciality. According to Muḥammad, the acquisition of knowledge is an ordinance that is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman; this assertion forms one of the most celebrated Prophetic traditions concerning the question of knowledge, and is accepted by both Sunnites and Shi'ites.[83] The fact that the tradition does not specify the type of knowledge to be acquired suggests that in the early days of Islam there was a consensus as to the meaning and connnotations

of the term *'ilm*. However, as Ghazālī points out in **Iḥyā 'ulūm al-dīn**, Muslim scholars disagreed as to exactly which branch of knowledge a Muslim is to acquire. As a result, he says, they split into approximately twenty different groups.[84] The scholastic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) insisted that *kalām* was obligatory since it is through this discpline that the unity of God, His essence and attributes, can be logically demonstrated. The jurists (*fuqahā'*) insisted on *fiqh* because the lawful, unlawful, forbidden and permissible things of everyday life and worship are determined through it. The exegetes (*mufassirūn*) and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) stood for *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*, claiming that it is only through these two sources that all other sciences can be reached. The Sufis, Ghazālī says, pointed to Sufism as the obligatory branch of knowledge, and so on. Each group was able to elevate its own particular specialization to the status of the obligatory knowledge intended in the Prophetic tradition quoted above.[85]

1.7 The terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* in Sunnite and Shi'ite traditions

Apart from the extensive use of the word *'ilm* and its derivatives in the Quran, there are countless traditions narrated from Muḥammad and his companions on the question of knowledge in both Shi'ite and Sunnite sources. The study of the Quranic usage of the term *'ilm* will follow on at the end of this chapter, so that the discrepancy which exists between its usage and the interpretation of various Muslim scholars may appear more clearly.

In the body of sayings attributed to Muḥammad — and, for the Shi'ites, the Imams — there can be found hundreds of traditions concerning the question

of knowledge and the excellence of those who acquire and disseminate it. Some of these sayings are so well known among Muslims that they have passed over into everyday language as proverbs and maxims. Sayings such as, 'Seek knowledge, even though it be in China,' [86] and 'I (Muḥammad) am the city of knowledge, and 'Alī is its gateway' [87] have been incorporated into many works of literature and poetry; the tradition, 'The acquisition of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim man and woman' [88] was one of the slogans even used by Iran's Reza Shah in his education reform programme of the 1930s. According to the traditions, whosoever treads the path towards the acquisition of *'ilm* will be placed on the road to Heaven by God;[89] those with knowledge (*'ulamā'*) are the custodians (*umanā'*) of religion;[90] the *'ulamā'* are the inheritors of the prophets;[91] one with knowledge (*'ālim*) who benefits from that knowledge is better in the sight of God than 70,000 devotees (*'ābid*);[92] to behold the face of one with knowledge (*'ālim*) is an act of worship;[93] he who acquires knowledge, acts upon it and imparts it to others only to please Allah is proclaimed as victorious and magnificent by all existing beings throughout the realms of the heavens;[94] knowledge is man's hope of immortal life, etc. Most of the traditions in both Shi'ite and Sunnite *ḥadīth* compilations do not clarify whether the term *'ilm* is to be understood as a specific branch of knowledge or not. However in two major works of *ḥadīth* — Kulaynī's **al-Kāfī** for the Shi'ites and Bukhārī's Ṣaḥīḥ for the Sunnites — there are sections which deal specifically with the transmission of traditions. The seventeenth chapter of **al-Kāfī** deals solely with the transmission of traditions, without the term *'ilm* being used once.[95] Yet the fact that this and a further five chapters at the end

of Kulaynī's **Kitāb-i faḍl al-'ilm** deal almost exclusively with the transmission, learning and teaching of narrations and are included under the title of *'ilm* points to the fact that the traditionists saw themselves as *'ulamā'* and were thus predisposed to interpreting *'ilm* as *'ilm al-ḥadīth* (science of traditions). In **Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī**, the implication is more explicit: the term *ahl al-'ilm* is interpreted by the compiler as denoting the *mujtahidūn*, those who exert themselves in the field of independent judgement, which at the time of Bukhārī meant the *muḥaddithūn*, the narrators and interpreters of traditions.[96]

There are certain traditions in which the actual meaning of the word *'ilm* is expounded by either the Prophet or the Imams. One such example is a tradition known as the *ḥadīth al-tathlīth* (lit. 'the 'trinity' tradition'). Muḥammad was once asked to define the term *'ilm*; he answered by saying that it consists of three things: *āya muḥkama; farīḍa 'ādila*; and *sunna qā'ima* . The problem here is one interpretation. Knowledge of *āya muḥkama* (lit. sound 'signs' or verses) can be understood to be the knowledge of those verses in the Quran whose meanings are precise and unequivocal; knowledge of *farīḍa 'ādila* (lit. just obligation) can be taken to imply the knowledge of obligatory acts to be carried out by Muslims in everyday life; knowledge of *sunna qāima* (lit. upright code) can be understood as the knowledge of the Muḥammadan *sunna* or code of Islamic imperatives and prohibitions. As such, all three sub-divisions would fall into the domain of 'scriptural' sciences such as *ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. The Iranian scholar Sayyid Muḥammad Rizvi, a contemporary translator of **al-Kāfī** into English, has interpreted the tradition in this way.[97] Muḥammad Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, a prominent Shi'ite of the middle Safavid

period, has, on the other hand, interpreted the tradition differently. Kāshānī interprets *āya muḥkama* as referring to the principles of belief (*uṣūl al-'aqā'id*); *farīḍa 'ādila* as refering to ethics and morals (*'ilm al-akhlāq*); and *sunna qā'ima* as referring to *fiqh*.[98] Mīr Dāmād , another Safavid scholar, interpreted *āya muḥkama* as 'major jurisprudence' (*fiqh al-akbar*); *farīḍa 'ādila* as 'minor jurisprudence' (*fiqh al-aṣghar*); and *sunna qā'ima* as the knowledge of ethics and morals.[99] The basic problem with traditions is one of interpretation, a problem that is aggravated by the fact that there can often be found several different versions of the same narration in different sources. In this sense, the interpretation of traditions is far more problematic than the exegesis of the Quran. As far as the traditions concerning *'ilm* are concerned, the vast majority do not specify the actual meaning of the word *'ilm* and thus it becomes open to each group of scholars to interpret them as it wishes. Kāshānī, for example, who was inclined towards the 'esoteric', sees the tradition in question as focusing on the fundamentals of belief, whereas it would be equally as feasible for an expert in the exoteric, 'scriptural' sciences, i.e. *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, to interpret the tradition according to his own criteria and in favour of his own branch of knowledge. In the context of the present study, the most notable example in which an expert in a particular branch of the Islamic sciences has limited the term *'ilm* to his own specialization is that of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, whose life and works will be evaluated in Chapter IV. Primarily a *muḥaddith* or narrator of traditions, Majlisī interpreted *'ilm* unequivocably as *'ilm al-ḥadīth*.[100]

1.8 Changes in the meaning of the terms *'ilm* and *fiqh*

'ilm is the broadest word in the Arabic language for knowledge. It is often equated with *ma'rifa* or *shu'ūr*, but there are marked distinctions in its usage.[101] The verb *'alima* (to know) covers one or two accusatives as it indicates knowledge of a thing or a proposition (as in the German *kennen* or *wissen*). In its early usage, *'ilm* was the knowledge of definite things such as the Quran, *ḥadīth*, *sharī'a* etc., as we have seen in the preceding section on the *ḥadīth* collections. *fiqh*, however, was originally used to mean the independent use of intelligence as a means of acquiring knowledge, but the word *faqīh* (one who is intelligent or knowing) has come to indicate a minor canon lawyer or jurisprudent: the *faqīh* is one who is able, through the independent use of his intelligence, to decide points of law by his own judgment in the absence or ignorance of a tradition bearing on the case in question. In the older theological language, *fiqh* was used in contrast with *'ilm*, which, besides knowledge of definite things such as the Quran and *tafsīr*, had come to denote the accurate knowledge of legal decisions handed down by the Prophet and his companions. *'ilm* and *fiqh* were considered as distinct qualities of the theologian; al-Mujāhid defines the sum total of all wisdom as being composed of '*al-Qur'ān, al-'ilm wa al-fiqh.*' [102] al-Mujāhid's definition limits the application of the terms to two well-defined areas of scriptural knowledge, thus showing clearly that by his time, considerable changes in meaning had occurred. The fact that the word *'ālim* may also be applied — in its broadest sense — to denote one who is proficient in *fiqh* means that a *faqīh* could easily be referred to as an *'ālim*, thus fusing the two terms together. The gradual broadening of the word *'ilm* — as was

demonstrated in the previous section — to any of the so-called Quranic sciences meant that the word *'ālim* could be used to denote a scholar in a wide sense, especially one using intellectual processes.

Against these gradual changes in meaning, there have been vigorous protests by many Muslim thinkers, the most notable of them being Ghazālī, who does not believe that the praise given in the Quran to the *'ulamā'* can apply to mere canon lawyers and jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*).

Ghazālī enumerates five branches of knowledge — all of which he classifies as praiseworthy (*mamdūḥ*) — which had undergone a transformation in meaning by his lifetime. These are *fiqh; 'ilm; tawḥīd; ḥikma*; and *taḏḵīr*. *fiqh*, which by Ghazālī's time had become established as jurisprudence, was claimed by him to have been changed by limitation (*taḥdīd*). Whereas *fiqh* originally meant 'discernment of the Truth', it was subsequently limited to ' the knowledge of unusual legal cases, the mastery of the minute details of their origins, excessive disputation on them, and the retention of the different opinions which relate to them.' [103] Ghazālī states that as far as the Quran is concerned, the term *fiqh* was applied to the 'science of the hereafter and the knowledge of the subtle defects of the soul, the influences which render works corrupt, the thorough realization of the inferiority of this earthly life, the urgent expectation of bliss in the hereafter, and the domination of fear (of God) over the heart.' [104] Ghazālī cites a verse in the Quran in which the believers are told that whenever they embark upon a fighting expedition, they should leave behind a contingent of individuals who will

busy themsleves with *tafaqquh* so that they may admonish the fighters when they return. *fiqh*, then, according to Ghazālī, is that which brings about such a warning and such a fear, not the 'details of ordinary divorce or divorce through *li'ān*, or manumission (*'ataq*), *salām* contracts, and hire, rental and lease (*ijāra*) conditions, which are the domain of jurisprudence and produce neither warning nor fear.' [105] Ghazālī asserts that devotion exclusively to the affairs of jurisprudence actually serves to harden the heart and remove from it the kind of fear which should be a result of *fiqh* in its original sense. In verse 7:179, the Quran states that those who are destined for hell have hearts which do not understand (*lahum qulūb lā yafqahūn*); in Ghazālī's opinion, this is connected with belief and not with legal opinions. 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī confirms Ghazālī's statements on the corruption of the term *fiqh*: in his interpretation of verse 9:122 he says that the true meaning of the word *tafaqquh* is the understanding (*fahm*) of 'all religious knowledge (*ma'ārif-i dīnī*), both fundamental (*uṣūl*) and secondary (*furū'*).' He adds that the term *fiqh* cannot be limited to the knowledge of the 'practical rules' (*aḥkām-i 'amalī*) of religion, i.e. *fiqh*, as it has been by the Muslim *'ulamā'*.[106]

Ghazālī does not go so far as to say that the term *fiqh* cannot be applied to the independently reached decisions of jurisprudents on points of Islamic law, but rather emphasizes that the term was originally applied to the 'science of the hereafter'; the restriction that took place in the term caused ambiguity which, he argues, caused some men to devote themselves solely to jurisprudence, thus neglecting the science of the hereafter and the nature of the soul and heart. The type of 'esoteric' knowledge facilitated by *fiqh* (in its orginal sense) is abstruse

and difficult to live by; furthermore, to attain through it candidacy for office or a position of power, prestige and wealth, is simply not possible. For this reason, Ghazālī says, Satan used the change in the term *fiqh* to 'make the neglect of the science of the hereafter, and the alteration in the connotation of the term, attractive to the human heart.' [107]

Clearly, Ghazālī condemns the misuse of the term *fiqh* but does not deny that jurisprudence has its place in Islamic society. However, he states that it is a branch of knowledge that is *farḍ al-kifāya*, i.e. its acquisition is of merit but not obligatory. As long as at least one person in the community is versed in the science of jurisprudence, the obligation to acquire that knowledge ceases to be binding on the rest of the community, who are then supposed to practise *taqlīd* or imitation of the chief jurisprudent in their midst.[108] According to Ghazālī, jurisprudence is connnected with religion only indirectly: since this world is the preparation for the hereafter, it is the fundamentals of belief which are its foundation. The regulation of social life and manner of government are secondary — albeit indispensible — adjuncts to the fundamentals of belief, and it is the regulation of social life and government, with its myriad laws and rules, that forms the domain of the jurisprudent. The heart is removed from this domain, since attention is focused only on the outward confession (Islam) and not the inward intention.[109] Concerning prayer, for example, the jurisprudent is entitled to give his opinion as to whether or not it has been correctly performed in accordance with the prescribed regulations, but is unable to pass judgement regarding the inner intentions of the worshipper. The jurisprudent, claims Ghazālī, is proficient in a branch of knowledge which relates to

the welfare of the believer in this world. Were one to enquire from a jurisprudent about divorce, or inheritance, or gambling, he would probably be able to recite volumes of minute details concerning these matters, most of which would never be used or needed; however, were one to enquire of him about sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) or the nature of hypocrisy (*rīyā* or *nifāq*), he would hesitate to express an opinion, even though the knowledge of these is an obligatory ordinance, the neglect of which brings about damnation in the hereafter.[110] A study of Ghazālī's Iḥyā shows that by his time, the proliferation of jurisprudents was such that 'the town is crowded with those who are employed in giving legal opinions and defending cases.' [111] Ghazālī expresses shock at the fact that some *farḍ al-kifāya* activities — most notably jurisprudence — are preferred to other fields of *farḍ al-kifāya* science such as medicine. He says that the reason could be that disciplines such as medicine 'do not lead to the management of religious endowments (*awqāf*), execution of wills, possession of the money of orphans, and appointment to judicial and governmental positions through which one exalts himself above his fellow men and fastens his yoke upon his enemies.' [112] Ghazālī's vitriol is reserved, clearly, not for the science of jurisprudence *per se*; indeed he goes to great lengths to extol early jurisprudents and scholars of the scriptural sciences such as al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, who were not only pious but were also quick to recognise the excellence of those versed in the esoteric sciences.[113] Ghazālī's attack is aimed at those individuals who were able to exploit the discipline of jurisprudence for their own ends. Confusion over the term *islām*/Islam, which, as we have already seen, results in inordinate emphasis on externals, facilitates further the popularity of the

faqīh; as al-Attas says, the preoccupation with the Islamic state and the *umma* in modern times is another indication of the exaggerated estimation accorded to the acquisition of *farḍ al-kifāya* knowledge such as jurisprudence. The gradual domination of the Islamic sciences by the jurisprudents — so berated by Ghazālī— cannot be seen solely as the machinations of 'learned men who have espoused evil,' as Ghazālī puts it; rather, we can understand it in terms of supply and demand. The majority of Muslims inclined towards Islam rather than *islām*, thus creating a demand for scholars who deal with externals rather than belief. Traditionally, this demand has been met by the experts in *fiqh* (in the sense of jurisprudence), the *fuqahā'*.

As far as the term *'ilm* is concerned, Ghazālī bemoans the change in meaning that it too has undergone. Originally, *'ilm* was applied to man's knowledge of God, His miracles, and His works among His servants and creatures. However, the true meaning of the term came to be altered — as in the case of the word *fiqh* — by limitation, until it became more commonly applied to those who debate cases of jurisprudence. Ghazālī argues that most of what is said in the Quran and traditions concerning *'ilm* relates to those who have knowledge of God, His ordinances, His works, and His attributes. The change in meaning, together with the fact that *'ilm* and *fiqh* became virtually coterminous, resulted in the term *'ulama* being applied to many who were ignorant of the true Quranic sciences of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*, but who were well versed in casuistry and were thus in a position to parade before the masses as 'versatile, learned men.' [114] From Ghazālī's comments it is clear that for him, *'ilm* can be perceived on two different yet complementary levels.

First and foremost, *'ilm* signifies man's knowledge of God and His attributes, etc. Secondly, the term can be applied to any one of the disciplines which sprang up as a result of the Islamic revelation, such as exegesis and the transmission of traditions. What Ghazālī objects to most vehemently is the limitation of the word *'ilm* to any one particular branch of knowledge and learning. Not only is limitation detrimental to the offending scholars and their followers — the Muslim masses — but it also reveals neglect on their part of the most fundamental knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of God, without which all other disciplines are ultimately worthless. 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī holds similar views. In his interpretation of Quranic verses in which the terms *'ilm* and *īmān* occur side by side, he says:

> It is clear that the meaning of *'ilm* and *īmān* in these verses denotes conviction (*yaqīn*) and adherence to those things which conviction necessitates. The word *'ilm* when used in the Quran means certainty of knowledge regarding God and His signs, while *īmān* signifies belief in the incumbency of those things which such knowledge necessitates.[115]

Both Shi'ite and Sunnite schools in theory hold that *'ilm* is a prerequisite of *īmān* . Thus it can be understood that what is intended fundamentally by the term *'ilm* cannot be limited to any one particular branch of knowledge; rather, it must refer to man's knowledge of God. In his commentary on a narration attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Iranian scholar 'Alī Tihrānī points out that belief in the realities of *tawḥīd* (Divine unity) cannot be attained without deliberation (*tafakkur*) and proofs based on knowledge (*barāhīn-i 'ilmī*): whilst there can exist

knowledge without belief, there can never be belief without knowledge. Belief has different levels and can be strengthened only in accordance with the amount of effort spent on thought, deliberation and the acquisition of knowledge. Tihrānī also explains that the intellectual perception of the existence of God, the validity of the messengerhood of Muḥammad, and other fundamentals of belief do not necessarily culminate in belief:

> Knowledge and perception are the produce of the intellect (*'aql*), whereas belief is the produce of the heart (*qalb*)... Satan was well-versed in all of the fundamentals of belief but was still branded an infidel by God. A philosopher too may explain at great length all the rational proofs for the existence of God yet still not believe, since his knowledge does not rise above his intellect... intellectual knowledge of the unity of God (*tawḥīd-i 'ilmī*)must be translated into acceptance of the heart (*tawḥīd-i qalbī*).[116]

1.9 Common understanding of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'*

Ghazālī's objection that the term *'ilm* had, by his time, undergone a transformation in meaning and had come to denote any kind of Muslim scholar — jurisprudent in particular — is still valid today. Throughout the Islamic world it is the *mujtahid*, the *mullā* and the *muftī*— all renowned chiefly for their prowess in the scriptural sciences — who are revered by the majority of Muslims as *'ulamā'*. Naturally there are individuals — mostly scholars themselves such as Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Tihrānī, al-Attas etc. — who draw careful distinctions between the various kinds of knowledge and emphasize that the fundamental type of *'ilm* is that which involves

the recognition of, and belief in, God. In the context of Shi'ite Iran in particular it was not until the turn of the present century that the meaning of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* were reconsidered in intellectual circles. Until then, the terms were used unequivocably to denote 'religious' knowledge (i.e. the scriptural disciplines) and those proficient in them. However, with the success of the industrial revolution and the rapid progress of all branches of natural science and technology in the West, plus the overwhelming influence that these developments had on the world of Islam, which had hitherto limited its perception of the concept of *'ilm* mainly to the scriptural disciplines, the term *'ilm* was broadened once more to denote 'natural science' and *al-'ulūm* to mean 'the sciences'. Reformist movements throughout the Muslim world took great pains to prove that scientific progress is not only reconciliable with the precepts of Islam but also predated by them. Whether the sole intention of the major reformers was to make the acceptance of science — and, in particular, science as spearheaded by the West — palatable to the taste of the Muslim masses is a matter for speculation. If the desired effect was to free the concept of *'ilm* from the monopoly of the jurisprudents, the reformists were, to an extent, successful. Muslim thinkers did indeed begin to re-appraise the term *'ilm* , but instead of reuniting it with its original meaning as understood by the likes of Ghazālī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī, for the most part all that they did was exchange one limited interpretation for another. A distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' sciences — where 'religious' denotes the scriptural sciences (*fiqh, ḥadīth* etc.), and 'secular' the natural sciences — was highlighted, even though the Quran admits of no such differentiation. If *'ilm* had been limited — albeit

erroneously — to the study of jurisprudence, it was now limited to the study of science in the Western sense of the term. Many books have since been written by Muslims extolling the virtues of modern science and endeavouring to prove, as the early reformers did, that 'science' and 'religion' (*'ilm wa dīn*) are compatible.

1.10 The term *'ilm* in the writings of contemporary Muslim scholars

The general trend among contemporary Muslim writers is to show that the term *'ilm* as used in the Quran and traditions is not confined to 'religious' knowledge but rather that it denotes the concept of knowledge in its widest sense. More particularly, their emphasis is upon the compatibility of modern science with the teachings of the Quran; numerous works on this theme have been authored by Muslim thinkers throughout the Islamic world.[117]

In **The Rights of Women in Islam**, Shaykh Yaḥyā Nūrī mentions the Quranic emphasis upon the acquisition of scientific knowledge as 'one of the greatest virtues of Islam.' The Quran encourages all men to learn and teach, thus raising the acquisition of knowledge to the status of obligation.[118] Nūrī does not specify the type of knowledge adumbrated by the Quran, but since his tract is an apologetic one in defense of the Islamic view of women it may be understood that it is the acquisition of science that he is inferring rather than that of *fiqh* or *ḥadīth* or, even, of God. In other similar works on the position of women in Islam, the objections raised by critics of Islam's stance *vis-a-vis* women are countered with reference to the Quranic emphasis on learning, education and the acquisition of knowledge.[119]

The late Iranian sociologist 'Alī Sharī'atī gives several different opinions on the question of *'ilm*. In his work **Islāmshināsī**, he states that the meaning of the term *'ilm* is general and cannot be limited to what he calls the 'religious sciences':

> Some Muslims have endeavoured to limit the word *'ilm* as used in the Quran to the domain of religious knowledge or jurisprudence. In actual fact, the word *'ilm* is used in a general sense. This is clear from Prophetic traditions such as 'Seek knowledge, even though it may be as far as China'.[120]

In another, earlier work, **Fāṭima Fāṭima ast**, Sharī'atī had painted a different picture of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'*, adopting a stance akin to that of Ghazālī:

> In Islam, the *'ālim* is not an uncommitted individual who happens to have lots of knowledge and knows lots of things. *'ilm*, in the mind of the true *'ālim* is not merely a mish-mash of facts and information: in his heart it is like a ray of light...the light of God.[121]

Sharī'atī goes on to say that the *'ilm* of the true *'ālim* is not something secret or mysterious or supernatural; neither can it be confined to specific fields such as history, geography, chemistry, jurisprudence etc. . These, according to Sharī'atī are 'scientific facts' and not light. The *'ilm* which brings guidance is the *'ilm* of faith (*'aqīda*) which is called *fiqh* in the Quran, although *fiqh* today means knowledge of Islamic social laws and contracts.[122]

In a later work, however, Sharī 'atī denounces the view he espoused in **Islāmshinsī** as an erroneous one, one that is more in keeping with the views of the modernists (*mutajaddidūn*). Quoting the tradition of Muḥammad which extols the ink of those with knowledge over the blood of the martyrs, Sharī'atī asserts that the term *'ilm* cannot be understood in a general sense. Neither, he declares, can it be understood as the 'founding fathers' (*qudamā'*) understood it, namely as being restricted to one particular field. For Sharī'atī, the trust (*amāna*) that was given to man by God was one of responsibility; the greatest responsibility rests on the shoulders of the *'ālim*. The kind of *'ilm* envisaged by the Quran, he says, is the knowledge owned by the 'enlightened intellectual' (*rawshanfikr*) and should be understood in the framework of modern, popular and revolutionary ideology.[123]

Murtaḍā Muṭahharī in his book **Insān wa Īmān** , points out the contradiction between *'ilm* and belief in the Old Testament, and divides the history of Western civilization into two main periods: the age of belief and the age of *'ilm*:

> Islamic civilization can also be divided into two eras: the age of 'blossoming glory', i.e. the age of *īmān* and *'ilm*; and the age of decline, i.e. the death of *īmān* and *'ilm*.[124]

Defining the term *'ilm*, he concludes that it is:

> Man's comprehensive and all-embracing view of the world; the result of mankind's collective efforts which have developed over the centuries. This view, which has been tempered by rules, conditions, laws and a language and logic peculiar to itself, is what

is known as *'ilm* (i.e. science).[125]

Furthermore, he concludes that 'history, the natural sciences, and the study of the human psyche' are the branches of science deemed most useful for man by the Quran.[126]

In the view of Mihdī Bāzargān, *'ilm* cannot be restricted to any one subject and must be understood in the widest sense possible. According to him, *'ilm* must be like a just judge — free, impartial and with the sole aim of seeking the truth. Bāzargān mirror's Ghazālī's objection that each group of scholars has limited the term *'ilm* to its own particular field. However, he says:

> God gave to man the 'knowledge of the names': the Quran does not say 'The knowledge of God, or of things celestial (*malakūtī*) ... '; rather, the knowledge was of things which are named...it is the type of knowledge which takes the suffix '-ology' (i.e. biology, geology, sociology), and cannot be restricted to any one field.[127]

The Iraqi Shi'ite scholar, Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr also equates *'ilm* with modern science, pointing out that the Quran discusses many phenomena which have only recently been understood in Western scientific *milieux*.[128] Similar views are offered by 'Allāma Maḥmūd Shaltūt, who states that *'ilm* cannot be limited to 'religious knowledge' and can be understood only in terms of knowledge of the physical creation.[129]

1.11 A study of Quranic *āyāt* and conclusion

According to the Quran, the acquisition of knowledge begins with the act of contemplation (*tafakkur*) upon the signs (*āyāt*) of God. The cosmos is perceived to be a vast showcase in which these signs are revealed to man by the Creator; with the wise use of reason (*ta'aqqul*), man gains knowledge of these signs and thus in turn gains knowledge of God, the revealer of the signs. Both *tafakkur* and *ta'aqqul* are prescribed emphatically in numerous Quranic verses, with the Quran asserting that unbelief and blasphemy are the result of man's non-use of his innate ability to read the 'signs' in the cosmos. The creation of the heavens and earth; the alternation of night and day; the sailing of ships upon the oceans; rain, winds, and clouds; animals, vegetation and fruits; the celestial bodies; the existence of different colours; the creation of men and women and the inherent differences beteen them; the existence of different languages and races; old age and weakness; the growth of a foetus in its mother's womb; the prophets and their histories; the fate of bygone civilizations; the life of Muḥammad and the circumstances surrounding his prophethood — all of these are 'signs' for men to ponder and approach with the correct use of their ability to reason. Man is enjoined to travel through the land in order that he may learn wisdom; upon those who wish not to understand, God shall place doubt, and neither signs nor warnings shall benefit them if they do not believe as a result of their unwillingness to understand. Whoever ignores the 'signs' is an oppressor of his own soul; he who 'hears' the signs but then rejects them will be punished.

The verses on *tafakkur* and *ta'aqqul* show that the act of contemplation is enjoined on man in order that he may gain knowledge (*'ilm*) of the signs, and by so doing come to realise that they are created and must be attributed to an omnipotent creator. Contemplation, thus, precedes knowledge and belief. Yet believers are also ordered to make continuous *tafakkur* and *ta'aqqul*, which serve to keep and increase belief. Indeed, numerous verses address those who already believe and tell them to continue contemplating the signs.

The knowledge gained through contemplation of the cosmos is considered worthless unless it leads to true and constantly renewed belief in the Creator. One may have knowledge of the signs but may not wish to attribute them to God. Knowledge which is not supplemented and perfected by belief, such as that in the possession of Pharoah or Satan, is of no use and will be punished by hellfire. In the hands of evil men, knowledge can be dangerous, for knowledge of the 'signs' can be of profit only if it is used as a means with which to know God. That the Quran does use the term *'ilm* to connote knowledge of things and facts is borne out by verses such as 10:5, in which it is written that Allah created the sun and the moon and their various stages so that man might 'know the number of years and the count of time.' Yet the emphasis remains always on the assertion that knowledge about created things is of value only on the condition that it leads to, or strengthens, belief in God.

The evolution of the Islamic sciences enumerated earlier was sanctioned by the Quranic emphasis on contemplation and the acquisition of *'ilm*, but nowhere

in the Quran can a verse be found which restricts knowledge to any one field or discipline. In fact, the Quran sees all knowledge of things, i.e. of the cosmos, as a means to an end, and not something that is to be pursued for its own sake. Indeed, the Quran declares quite categorically that the only men who fear God are 'those who know' (*'ulamā'*), which obviously excludes those who pursue the knowledge of a thing for its own sake, i.e. without consciously contemplating it in order to gain knowledge about, and belief in, its Creator.

> "Those truly fear God, among His servants, who have knowledge: for God is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving."

The use of the word *'ulamā'* in this verse can, according to Ghazālī, denote only those who are convinced of the existence of God and all His attributes; he adds that the 'goal of the science of practical religion is revelation, and the goal of revelation is to know God.' 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets the above verse in a similar fashion, concluding that the *'ulamā'* are those who know God by His names and attributes and acts; theirs is a complete knowledge which bestows tranquility upon their hearts and wipes all doubt from their souls.

Thus the appropriation of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* by Muslim scholars, past and present, to describe one particular branch of learning to the exclusion of others, has no Quranic justification. True *'ilm* is not the knowledge of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* as the 'founding fathers' insisted; nor is it, as the modernists would have it, 20th century science and the study of nature. Following the argument of the Quran

to its logical conclusion, we may say that while, for example, an *'ālim* (in the true Quranic sense of the word, i.e. one who knows God) may also be, say, a *faqīh* (in the corrupted sense of the word, i.e. one who is versed in jurisprudence), the reverse may not always be so. Consequently, a *faqīh* may possess no real knowledge (*'ilm*) about God whatsoever.

1. For a concise historical study of the development of Islamic theological speculation, see: W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, UEP, 1979). Pages 32-5 deal specifically with the Murji'ite sect.

2. Numerous Quranic verses present the universe and all that it contains as 'signs' or pointers to the existence of God; many of these verses end with one or more of the 'beautiful names' (*asmā' al-ḥusnā*) of Allah, thus inferring that contemplation of the cosmos has, or should have, as its direct corollary the attribution of the cosmos, as an act of creation, to the Deity.

3. *kafara* means to cover or hide something, and therefore by association connotes the state of one who does not attribute the existence of the cosmos to a Creator. For a more comprehensive study of the concept of *kufr*, see the article in *EI*, 2nd edition.

4. See: 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Pidar, mādar, mā muttahamim* (Tehran, 1976). Sharī'atī's highly polemical tract is levelled against the blind imitation of Islam by what he believes to be the majority of Muslims, for whom rite and ritual are equated automatically with belief. See also: Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* (Cairo, 1367-75) for a Sunnite view of the same question; and: W. Cantwell Smith, 'The Special Case of Islam' in *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, 1964), pp. 75-108.

5. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future* (London, Mansell Publishing, 1985), p. 112.

6. *farḍ al-kifāya* describes an act or practice that is obligatory for some Muslims only, in contrast with *farḍ al-'ayn*, which is obligatory for all Muslims.

7. Verses 30:20-27; 16:65-70, among others. There are approximately 400 references to 'signs' in the Quran, the majority of which deal with belief or unbelief in God's *āyāt*.

9. Sayyid 'Alī Khāmini'ī, *Ṭarḥ-i kullī-i andīsha-i islāmī dar Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1354 Sh./1975-76), p. 11.

10. ibid., p. 15.

11. Verse 2:285 mentions four: Allah, angels, books and prophets. Verse 4:136 mentions all of the above plus the day of judgement.

12. Verse 8:2 — "For, Believers are those who, when God is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His Signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord."

13. Verse 8:4 — "Such in truth are the Believers: they have grades of dignity with their Lord, and forgiveness, and generous sustenance."

14. Islam holds that God's creative act is beyond time and space, that the cosmos is being renewed constantly at each instant, and that the signs (*āyāt*) of God are being revealed incessantly in new forms and modes. The Quranic basis for this belief comes from verse 50:29 — "Every day in (new) splendour doth He (shine)." See also: Ṣadr al-dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, ed. by

Muḥammad Riḍā al-Muẓaffar. (Tehran, 1378/1958-59), vol. 1, part 1, p. 116 and vol. 1, part 2, p. 314.

15. Verse 3:191 — "Men who celebrate (*dhikr*) the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the thought): 'Our Lord! not for naught hast Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the fire.' "

16. Verse 4:136 — "O ye who believe! Believe in God and His Apostle, and the scripture which He hath sent to His Apostle and the scripture which He sent to those before (him). Any who denieth God, His angels, His books, His Apostles, and the Day of Judgement, hath gone far, far astray."

17. There are 67 verses in which *ṣalāt* (prayer) is mentioned, with 32 verses for *zakāt* (religious taxes), 9 for *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), and 7 for *ṣawm* (fasting).

18. Verse 9:71 — "The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle. On them will God pour His mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise."

19. *aslama* also embraces such meaning as: to forsake, leave, desert, give up, betray; to let sink, drop; to hand over, turn over; to leave, abandon, deliver up, surrender; to commit oneself; to declare oneself committed to the will of God; to become Muslim, embrace Islam. See: Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary* (New York: SLS, 1976), pp. 424-5.

20. Verse 4:94 — "O ye who believe! When ye go abroad in the cause of God, investigate carefully, and say not to anyone who offers you a salutation: 'Thou art none of a Believer.' "

21. Verse 3:67 — "Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in faith (*ḥanīf*), and bowed his will to God's (*muslim*), and he joined not gods with God."

22. Verse 2:136 — "Say ye: 'We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to God (*muslimūn*).' "

23. In verse 10:72, the prophet Noah tells his people that the reward for his preaching to them is from God, for " I have been commanded to be of those who submit to God's Will (*muslim*)."

24. Verse 2:128 — " 'Our Lord! Make of us muslims, bowing to Thy (Will), and of our progeny a people muslim, bowing to Thy (Will).' "

25. Verse 2:133 — "Were ye witnesses when Death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: 'What will ye worship after me?' They said: 'We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, of Abraham, Ismail and Isaac, the One God: to Him we bow (*muslimūn*).' "

26. Verse 12:101 — "Take Thou my soul (at death) as one submitting to Thy Will (*muslim*), and unite me with the righteous."

27. Verse 3:52 — "Said the disciples: 'We are God's helpers: we believe in God, and do thou bear witness that we are muslims.' "

28. Verse 2:112 — "Nay, – whoever submits his whole self to God and is a doer of good, – he will get his reward with his Lord, on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

29. Verse 5:4 — "This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."

30. Seyyed Hasan 'Askari, 'Religion and Development' in *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1986), p. 79.

31. Verse 2:208 — "O ye who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly.." The word *islām* here very likely connotes the personal submission of the self that goes to perfect *īmān*. For a concise explanation of the meaning of submission as the perfection of belief, see: Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-mizān* (Tehran, 1364 Sh./1985-86), vol 1, p. 418. [This work will henceforth be referred to as *al-Mīzān*]. See also: Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *'Adl-i ilāhī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1397/1976-77), pp. 350-53.

32. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Cairo, 1313/1895-6), vol. 3, p. 184.

33. See the article entitled *islām* in *EI*, 2nd edition.

34. A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge: CUP, 1932), p. 194.

35. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmīyyīn* ed. by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 322.

36. L. Gardet, 'ISLĀM' in *EI*, new edition, vol. 4, p. 172.

37. *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 173.

38. *ibid.*

39. *ibid.*

40. Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam* (Belmont: Dickenson, 1969), p. 5.

41. See footnote 28.

42. Verse 31:22 — "Whoever submits his whole self to God, and is a doer of good, has grasped indeed the most trustworthy hand-hold: and with God rests the End and Decision of (all) affairs."

43. Throughout this chapter, the personal and individual submission of a believer is referred to as *islām*, and the communal religion of which he is part as Islam. The words *muslim* and Muslim are used accordingly. It is to be hoped that the reader will not be unduly confused by this schema, but will appreciate the subtle difference between the two concepts and also the need for a way of distinguishing between them.

44. See footnote 29 for a translation of this verse.

45. Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Istanbul, 1307/1891), vol. 7, pp. 608-09.

46. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm, tafsīr al-manār* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1367 - 1375/1948 - 1956), vol. 3, pp. 359-60.

47. The word *al-ṣāliḥāt* (righteous acts) occurs 62 times in the Quran; on each occasion it is preceded by the phrase 'those who believe', e.g. in verse 2:25 — "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work acts of righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow..." For a complete list, see: Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-mufahris li alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Beirut, 1363/1943-44), pp. 411-2.

48. Jane I. Smith, 'Continuity and Change in the Understanding of '*islām*' in *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1972), pp. 129-30.

49. Ibn 'Abbās, *Tanwīr al-miqbās* (Tehran: al-Maktabat al-Islāmiyya, 1377/1957-8), vol.1, p. 189.

50. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Cairo, 1323-29/1900-11), vol. 26, p. 90.

51. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, vol. 3, p. 358.

52. Verse 61:9 — "It is He Who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it)."

53. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, vol. 3, p. 361.

54. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, transl. and ed. by A. A. Khusrawī Shabistarī (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Amīrī, 1351 Sh./1972-73), p. 15.

55. *ibid.*, p. 16. For a clarification of the term *wilāya*, which is used by Shi'ites and Sufis alike, but with radically different connotations, see: J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 133-7.

56. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Tashayyu'-i 'alawī wa tashayyu'-i ṣafawī* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), p. 62.

57. Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfī* , p. 16.

58. *ibid.*, p.17.

59. *ibid.*, p.18.

60. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, p. 418.

61. *ibid.*, p. 418.

62. Verse 43:69 — "(Being) those who have believed in Our Signs and bowed (their wills to Ours) in Islam."

63. Verse 2:208 — "O ye who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly, and follow not the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy."

64. Verse 49:15 — "Only those are Believers who have believed in God and His apostle, and have never since doubted, but have striven with their belongings and their persons in the cause of God: such are the sincere ones."

65. Verse 61:11 — "That ye believe in God and His apostle, and that ye strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your property and your persons: that will best for you, if ye but knew."

66. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, p. 419.

67. Verse 4:65 — "But no, by thy Lord, they can have no (real) faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction."

68. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, p. 420.

69. See p. 11 of the present study.

70. See p. 17 of the present study.

71. Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, transl. by N. A. Faris (Lahore: Ashraf Press, 1962), p. 2.

72. See p. 19 of the present study.

73. For example, verse 76:3 — "We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will)."

74. For an excellent study of the Islamic concept of *'ilm* see: Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Rosenthal says that the concept of knowledge has always dominated all aspects of Muslim intellectual, spiritual and social life, and believes that in Islam, knowledge has enjoyed a status unparalleled in other civilizations.

75. See: Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) Pages 200-244 are given over to an appraisal of several Islamic theories of knowledge; the opinions of scholars such as Ṣadrā, Ibn Sīnā, Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī, Fārābī, and Suhrawardī are compared and analysed.

76. 'Abd al-Riḍā Ḥijāzī, *Qur'ān dar 'aṣr-i faḍā* (Tehran: Kānūn-i Intishārāt, 1354 Sh./1975-76), p. 170.

77. Ẓālim b. 'Amr Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ūlī, died 67/686-7.

78. Cited in: Ḥijāzī, *Qur'ān dar 'aṣr-i faḍā*, p. 170.

79. Although the Quran itself admits of no difference between 'religious' and 'secular' knowledge, the aforementioned disciplines may be divided into the 'scriptural' and 'non-scriptural': the former denoting fields of study involving the Quran, the Traditions and the derivation of laws therefrom; the latter denoting what in secular terms would be called 'natural' or social sciences.

80. Sayyid Abū al-faḍl 'Allāma Burqa'ī, *Muqaddima bar tābishī az Qur'ān* (Tehran, 1985), pp. 60-1.

81. See: H. A. R. Gibb, *Islam* (Oxford: OUP, 1975) for a lucid and comprehensive outline of the development of various branches of Islamic learning. Chapters 5 and 6 are particularly useful.

82. Ḥijāzī, *Qur'ān dar 'aṣr-i faḍā*, p. 170.

83. Muḥammad b. Yazīd Ibn Māja, *al-Sunan* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1372/1952-53), intro., 16:9; Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb faḍl al-'ilm*, transl. by Sayyid Muḥammad Rizvi (Tehran: WOFIS, 1398/1977-8), p. 73.

84. Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, p. 30.

85. *ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

86. *ibid.*, p. 18. See also: Ḥasan Ḥasanzāda Āmulī, *Ma'rifat al-nafs* (Tehran: Markaz-i Intishārat-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1362 Sh./1983-84), vol. 3, p. 435.

87. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, p. 144.

88. See footnote 83.

89. Kulaynī, *Kitāb faḍl al-'ilm*, p. 85.

90. *ibid.*, p. 80.

91. *ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

92. *ibid.*, p. 81.

93. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 2nd edition (Beirut, 1403/1982-83), vol. 1, p. 195. This will henceforth be referred to as *Biḥār II.*

94. Kulaynī, *Kitāb faḍl al-'ilm*, p. 88.

95. *ibid.*, pp. 131-7.

96. Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Istanbul: Hilal Yayınları, 1298/1977-8), vol. 9, p. 309.

97. Kulaynī, *Kitāb faḍl al-'ilm*, p. 78.

98. Sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim 'Asar, *'Ilm al-ḥadīth* (Tehran, 1354 Sh./1975-76), p. 41.

99. *ibid.*, p. 41.

100. Majlisī's life and works will be appraised in Chapters IV and V.

101. *ma'rifa* is 'coming to know by experience or reflection' and implies prior ignorance; thus it cannot be predicated of God's knowledge. *shu'ūr* is perception, especially of details; the *shā'ir* is the perceiver, and also the poet. See the entry on *'ilm* in *EI*, second edition.

102. Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 56.

103. Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, p. 80.

104. *ibid.*, p. 80.

105. Verse 9:122 — "Nor should the believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion (*tafaqquh*), and admonish the people when they return to them, – that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)."

106. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 9, p. 640.

107. Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, p. 83.

108. Rūḥullāh Khumaynī, *Tawḍīḥ al-masā'il* (Tehran, 1979), p. 2.

109. Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, p. 42.

110. *ibid.*, p. 50.

111. *ibid.*, p. 51.

112. *ibid.*, p. 51.

113. *ibid.*, pp. 59-72.

114. *ibid.*, p. 84.

115. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 16, p. 325.

116. 'Alī Tihrānī, *Akhlāq-i islāmī* (Mashhad, 1977), vol. 1, p. 68.

117. See for example: Ḥijāzī, *Qur'ān dar 'aṣr-i faḍā*; Maurice Bucaille, *La Bible, le Coran et le Science* (Paris: Seghers, 1976); and Dr. Yaḥyā Naẓīrī, *Qur'ān wa padīdahā-i ṭabī'at az dīd-i dānish-i imrūz* (Tehran, 1358 Sh./1979-80).

118. Shaykh Yaḥyā Nūrī, *Ḥuqūq wa ḥudūd-i zan dar islām* (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1961-62), p. 121.

119. See: Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *Ḥuqūq-i zan dar islām* (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978-79).

120. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Islāmshināsī* (Mashhad, 1347 Sh./1968-69), pp. 42-3.

121. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Fāṭima Fāṭima ast* (Tehran, 1336 Sh./1957-58), pp. 40-1.

122. *ibid.*, p. 41.

123. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Mas'ūliyyat-i shī'ī būdan* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), pp. 25-7.

124. Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *Insān wa islām* (Tehran, 1357 Sh./1978-79), p. 28.

125. *ibid.*, p. 12.

126. *ibid.*, pp. 92-4.

127. Mihdī Bāzargān, *Gumrāhān* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983-84), pp. 92-3.

128. Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr, *Inqilāb-i mahdī wa pindārhā*, transl. by S. A. 'Alam al-hudā (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984-85), p. 19.

129. 'Allāma Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Sayrī dar ta'ālīm-i islām*, transl. by S. K. Khalīlīyān (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965-66), p. 146.

Chapter II

Religion in pre-Safavid Iran and the rise of the Safavids

2.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter it was concluded that according to the Quran , the ultimate goal of all knowledge (*'ilm*) is the gnosis of God and His attributes: those who achieve such knowledge, confirm it through belief (*īmān*) and then submit themselves (*islām*) are the true *'ulamā'* in the Quranic sense of the word. Adherence to the *sharī'a* (Islam) is a logical concomitant of internal submission, but not an inevitable one: individuals may perceive themselves to be Muslims yet remain defective in terms of both *īmān* and *islām*.

The Quran embraces both *īmān* — of which *islām* is a complementary component — and Islam, and Muḥammad, as the pivotal channel through which the revelation is expressed and objectified, is presented as the embodiment of both aspects. *īmān*, as the cornerstone and *raison d'être* of the revelation, focuses on the *ḥaqīqa* or sacred truth of the Islamic worldview, whilst Islam, the body of rules and laws designed to regulate all aspects of the lives of those who have 'submitted', centres on the *sharī'a*. Most of the Quranic verses were revealed in Mecca and concern the fundamentals of belief and gnosis: it is basically from these verses that the roots of later metaphysical speculation can be discerned. The verses revealed in Medina, where Muḥammad finally succeeded in creating an environment

of 'communal submission', i.e. *islām* institutionalized as Islam, contain the bulk of the Quranic commands germane to the social, political and economic aspects of the Muslim's daily life. It is too much of a simplification to suggest that the Meccan verses represent *īmān* and the Medinan verses Islam, chiefly because the latter group of verses are not geared exclusively towards externals. This serves to illustrate that while *īmān* is the cornerstone of Islam, it is not posited as merely a stage which has to be passed on the way to Islam; rather, *īmān* is to be constantly renewed and strengthened. It is, in a sense, dynamic, whereas Islam is static. Muḥammad, hailed by his followers as the *muballigh* (communicator) *par excellence* of the revelation, transmitted both his knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) and his knowledge of the commands of God (*sharī'a*) to his people. Neither *īmān* nor Islam was sacrificed for the sake of the other; the important difference between them was recognized, yet the innate harmony that exists between the two aspects was preserved.

While it does not recognize or encourage a formal, institutionalized 'clergy', the Quran does adumbrate the existence of a body of *'ulamā'*, those who 'know' God and communicate their knowledge of Him and His commands to others. Given the theoretical interdependence of *īmān* and Islam, the ideal *'ālim* would possess, and be able to transmit, knowledge pertaining to both aspects. In reality, however, relatively few Muslim scholars have been able to combine these two aspects — with *īmān* as the *raison d'être* of Islam — as their basis for either learning or teaching. In practical terms, the pull towards Islam has always been far stronger than that towards *īmān*, and this has been amply reflected in the academic ori-

entations of Muslim scholars throughout the ages. An investigation into the whys and wherefores of the obstacles to belief and the predominance of Islam over *īmān* would entail a detailed study of the nature and psyche of man as perceived by the Islamic revelation, a task far beyond the scope of the present work. Suffice it to say that the domination of Islam over *īmān* is suggested by the Quran itself. The Quran holds that most human beings do not ponder the *āyāt* and, therefore, do not truly believe in a Creator; of those that do believe, moreover, most do so only deficiently, preferring to join other idols with Allah rather than worship Him alone.[1] It also states, as already stressed in Chapter I, that what is perceived as *īmān* often turns out only to be Islam.[2] Thus, one of the deficiencies of belief may be the inordinate amount of attention that is paid to Islam to the detriment of *īmān*: as A. Schimmel observes, the great mass of Muslims have followed, and continue to follow, the exoteric facet (i.e. Islam) of the Islamic revelation, while only a minority have had as their goal 'the salvific love and knowledge of God.' [3] This divide between what Schimmel — among others — terms the esoteric and the exoteric is evident in the scholarly inclinations of the *'ulamā'* and serves, thus, to split the vast body of Muslim scholars in two camps: one that has as its primary goal the knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allah*), and another that focuses its attention on the knowledge of the commands of God (*awāmir Allah*). Some writers use the terms *ahl al-bāṭin* and *ahl al-ẓāhir*;[4] the Safavid philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā refers to the *ahl al-kashf* and the *ahl al-naql*, the former alluding to those who use reason, contemplation and gnostic introspection to know God, the latter referring to the study and promulgation of the scriptural sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya*).[5]

One scholar, in the context of the polarization of these two groups that existed in Safavid Iran, talks of the perennial clash 'between Sufi and *faqīh*.' [6] For the purpose of this study I have chosen not to use the terms 'esoteric' and 'exoteric', chiefly because the former connotes doctrines that are open only to an elect few; while it is true that, according to the Quran, real belief in, and knowledge of, God are attained only by a minority, the guidance which is supposed to take man to God is portrayed as being available to everyone.[7] Instead of 'esoteric' and 'exoteric' I have used the terms 'internalist' and 'externalist'.[8] The appellation 'internalist' is intended to embrace all those Muslim scholars, groups and individuals whose attention was focused primarily on the fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-īmān*), i.e Divine unity (*tawḥīd*), Prophethood (*nabuwwa*) and the Resurrection (*ma'ād*), but more particularly on the knowledge of God and His attributes (*ma'rifa*). In this sense, internalism has often been best articulated by those attached in some way or other to Sufism and Sufi orders, although there are individuals included in this category who are not attached to any particular Sufi group: Ghazālī and Mullā Ṣadrā are two notable examples. In contrast, the term 'externalist' is used to cover those Muslim scholars whose academic efforts preponderated on the scriptural sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya*), and whose primary consideration was the learning and teaching of the 'secondary sciences' (*al-furū'*), particularly *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. This division between internalism and externalism and the subsequent polarization between two camps of Muslim scholars has existed for almost as long as Islam itself, and can be seen as an embodiment of the distinction that evolved between belief (*īmān*) and action (Islam). However, this is not to cast aspersions on either

the belief of the 'externalists' or the level of Islam of the 'internalists': the question here is simply one of emphasis and orientation. Neither does this schema intend to imply that a Muslim scholar is either wholly internalist or wholly externalist in outlook and academic output; true to the spirit of their Book, there have always been individuals who have attempted to combine *īmān* with Islam, *uṣūl* with *furū'*, and *'aql* with *naql* in the correct proportions, and have advocated a *rapprochement* between the internal and external aspects of the faith in their writings: again, Ghazālī from among the Sunnites and Mullā Ṣadrā from among the Shi'ites are prominent examples. The concept of an internalist-externalist dichotomy exists in both Sunnite and Shi'ite contexts and the relevance of the question for the modern Islamic community has also been recognized by representatives of both groups. In the view of the Sunnite scholar Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas, as we have aleady seen, the rise of false *'ulamā'* has led to the equally false restriction of *'ilm* to the domain of jurisprudence:

> Notwithstanding the fact that the Holy Quran repeatedly condemns it, they (the *'ulamā'*) delight in endless controversy, disputations and polemics ...in whose blind paths the generality of Muslims are left guideless and bewildered. This misguidance leads to emphasis on differences between the various *madhāhib* and to obstinate adherence to trivialities within them...their incessant elaboration of trivialities leads to the neglect of the real problem of education. They are content at leaving the Muslim's basic education in *farḍu 'ayn* knowledge at the infantile level while they allow the development of *farḍu kifāyah* knowledge to increase tremendously. In this way the amount of secular knowledge increases and develops in the Muslim's life out of proportion to the religious so that the Muslim spends most of his adult life knowing

more about the world and less about religion. Thus we have weak Muslims and weak and dangerous leaders whose comprehension and knowledge of Islam is stunted at the level of immaturity; and because of this Islam itself is erroneously made to appear as if 'underdeveloped' or 'misdeveloped' or left to 'stagnate.' [9]

Whereas al-Attas defines the problem in terms of *farḍ al-kifāya* knowledge, i.e. the secondary sciences or *furū'*, over the more important *farḍ al-'ayn* knowledge, which he describes elsewhere as the knowledge of God,[10] the Shi'ite writer M.K. Yusufi reaches a similar conclusion from the angle of *īmān* and Islam:

Most Muslims are Muslims by name, custom and geographical situation alone: they neither ponder nor contemplate, and their belief — which is the lowest form of belief — they take for granted and never question. For the common Muslim (*musalmān-i 'āmī*), a believer is one who prays and fasts and pays alms, and the more he does these things, the better believer he is seen to be. For the common Muslim, belief is static (*t̲h̲ābit*) whereas action (*'amal*) is dynamic (*qābil-i kam wa ziyād shudan*). In reality, of course, the opposite is true. The fact that the majority of *'ulamā'* are jurists (*fuqahā'*) reflects the ignorance of the majority of the Muslim masses and their obsession with the external acts (*a'māl-i ẓāhirī*) which they believe constitute faith. The *faqīh* is like a doctor who thinks he can cure his patients by advocating cleaner clothes, while ignoring or simply not realising that beneath those clothes the body is crippled by a thousand and one chronic diseases. The *faqīh* reinforces the common Muslim's false assumption that he is a believer and that it is now the time for action, since action is a true indicator of belief...this leads him further into the clutches of the *faqīh*, whose speciality is action over and above belief, and so the circle completes itself...[11]

The author goes on to state that the *faqīh*'s aversion to matters that concern solely 'the knowledge of the soul (*nafs*) and the real place of the created being (*khalq*) *vis-a-vis* the Creator (*khāliq*) stems from his fear of the reality of belief, in which man is answerable not to the *mullā* or to the *imām* but to God himself.' [12] In an ideal Islamic community, he asserts, 'the world of the *faqīh* would be a very dark and constrained one, since he would realise that his true importance (i.e. as a *faqīh*) is much less than that which he has come to expect and demand.' [13]

In the summer of the year 907/1501-02, the thirteen-year old Safavid leader Ismā'īl entered the town of Tabriz and proclaimed himself Shah; his first royal order was that the Muslim call to prayer (*adhān*) should henceforth be: ' I profess that there is no god but Allah, that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah, and that 'Alī is the *walī* of Allah.' [14] Thus was Twelver Shi'ism established as the state religion of Iran...or was it?

This momentous event, which was to change radically the political and religious face of Iran, poses several important questions. Firstly, why was Twelver Shi'ism in particular proclaimed as the state religion, and to what extent did political considerations figure in the new leader's choice? In the light of the internalist/externalist question, which particular 'face' of Twelver Shi'ism was shown to the people and why? How widespread was Twelver Shi'ism in Iran before the advent of Ismā'īl , and to what extent, if any, did its presence in pre-Safavid Iran facilitate its introduction as the new state religion? According to the contemporary Iranian scholar Hossein Nasr, the ground had been well prepared for what he calls

the 'sudden establishment of Shi'ism' and for the 'rapid change' that came about as a result. He cites several centuries of growth of Shi'ite theology and jurisprudence, the development of Sufi orders with Shi'ite tendencies, and the establishment of Shi'ite political regimes before the Safavid period as the chief factors behind the transformation of the country into a predominantly Shi'ite state.[15] Although Nasr's contentions are in one sense not wholly unjustifiable, it would be misleading to see them as the cause of what he implies was a relatively smooth change in religious orientation. The statement 'Shi'ism became the state religion' — used by most modern historians covering the Safavid era — is extremely vague, since it implies that Shi'ism is a single, easily definable, homogenous whole. Shi'ism, like Islam itself, can be all things to all men, and it is difficult to appraise as objectively as possible the events of the Safavid era without qualifying the terms Shi'ism, Sufism and Islam in the appropriate manner. If by the term Shi'ism Nasr and other writers have in mind the kind of religious orientation that was institutionalized by the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* at the end of the Safavid period (i.e. what in this thesis is described as 'orthodox, externalist Twelver Shi'ism'), then Nasr's argument concerning pre-Safavid Iran becomes even less tenable. Although orthodox Twelver Shi'ism did not enter a cultural vacuum when it was invited into Iran, it did, nevertheless, enter as a relative unknown or long-forgotten entity. As Mazzaoui remarks, Shi'ism was so novel that even the celebrated historian Rūmlū had to do some calculations with various dates in order to determine when he had last heard or read about it.[16] The unintentionally misleading remarks of Hossein Nasr may be qualified as follows: firstly, whilst it is true that (orthodox) Twelver Shi'ite the-

ology and jurisprudence underwent several centuries of growth prior to the Safavid era, their development was mainly in the hands of Arab scholars operating well outside the Iranian sphere; secondly, Sufism of all colours and degrees flourished in pre-Safavid Iran, much of it with pro-Alid tendencies, but this should not be construed as a sign that it was pro-Shi'ite in the orthodox sense of the term; and thirdly, the 'Shi'ite political regimes' that he mentions were for the most part of a transient nature, and their Shi'ism was either nominal or unorthodox. What, then, was the state of religion in general, and Shi'ism in particular, in pre-Safavid Iran? It is to this question that we now turn.

2.2 The position of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism

By the middle of the 5th/11th century, the foundations of Twelver Shi'ite theology and jurisprudence had been laid, and it is from this point in time that we can speak of an 'orthodoxy': the 'four books' of Twelver traditions — the cornerstone of Shi'ite *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* — had long since been compiled;[17] Shi'ite *kalām* had been purged of the extremism (*ghuluww*) it had exhibited in its foetal stages and had moved nearer to the Mu'tazilite-based doctrines with which it has since been generally associated; and important steps had also been taken to define the principles of Shi'ite jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and to establish the theoretical basis for the status and functions of the *fuqahā'*. These developments took place in various centres of Twelver Shi'ism such as Qum, Baghdad and Najaf, and were carried out by Arab and Persian scholars alike. An illustrious quintet of men, three of whom hailed from Iran, were chiefly responsible for assembling together the bare

bones of orthodox Twelver externalism which were to be fleshed out and elaborated upon by later generations: Muḥammad al-Kulaynī(d. 329/940-01); Muḥammad al-Qummī, known as Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991-02); Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, known as Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa (d. 460/1067-68); Shaykh Mufīd (d. 413/1022-23); and 'Alam al-Hudā (d. 436/1044-45). Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya and Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa are commonly referred to as the 'first three Muḥammads' and are widely recognised in Twelver circles as the 'founding fathers' of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism.

From the beginning of the 4th/10th century until the middle of the 6th/12th century, the most important scholars of the Twelver Shi'ite world had been Persian, but towards the end of the Saljuq era a shift occurred and for the next four hundred years or so until the end of the Safavid era, the most important scholars were to be Arabs, and the most important Twelver centres were to flourish outside Iran. An idea of the geographical spread of Twelver Shi'ism can be gained from a statistical analysis of the geographical origins of the scholars of the periods concerned. From tables compiled to show the geographical origins of Twelver scholars who died from the 4th/10th to the 12th/18th centuries it becomes apparent that the peak period for Persian scholars was the 6th/12th century.[18] After that, the Arab scholars led the field and Twelver Shi'ism was centred mainly outside of Iran. Al-Aḥsa', Jabal 'Āmil, Bahrein and Ḥilla became, and remained, the most important centres of Twelver learning until towards the end of the Safavid period. Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī's geographical work **Nuzhat al-qulūb** , written in 740/1339-40, gives a similar picture of the incidence of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq. Out of 63 place-name entries in which the religious orientation of the inhabitants is mentioned, only

14 are predominantly Twelver Shi'ite.[19] The traditional Twelver centres in Iran such as Rayy, Sabziwar, Kashan, Qum and the northern crescent of Mazandaran and Gilan are the major enclaves of Twelver Shi'ism in the immediate pre-Safavid period. According to Mustawfī, most towns and villages across Iran adhered to either the Shafi'ite or Hanafite schools of jurisprudence, although no single *maḏẖab* had a monopoly on any one location. Interestingly enough, Mustawfī describes the Twelver Shi'ites in most of the towns in which they constituted a majority as 'bigoted'.[20] Interaction between the Twelvers and the adherents of the Sunni schools seems to have been based largely on the question of the superiority of 'Alī over the first three Caliphs. In **Majālis al-mu'minīn**, Qāḍī Nūrullāh al-Shūshtarī, a staunch Twelver, mentions several incidents in which the adherents of Twelver Shi'ism are seen to score cheap points over their Sunnite compatriots through mockery and name-calling.[21] At the same time, Shūshtarī goes to great lengths to prove that pre-Safavid Iran was predominantly Twelver Shi'ite, and that many celebrated scholars who were renowned as Sunnites were, in actual fact, Twelvers operating under the cloak of *taqīyya* or dissimulation. For Shūshtarī, even one line of verse in Rūmī's **Maṯẖnawī** praising the family of Muḥammad is enough to convince him that the poet was a Twelver Shi'ite.[22] However, the fact that when Ismā'īl entered Tabriz he was at a loss to find a book which contained the principal tenets of Twelver Shi'ism, and was only able to find a single manuscript on jurisprudence in an obscure private library, confirms the generally accepted theory that pre-Safavid Iran was, as far as *maḏẖab* is concerned, predominantly Sunnite.[23] Not even in Kashan, known because of its staunch Shi'ism as *Dar al-*

mu'minīn (abode of believers), could a competent Twelver *faqīh* be found for more than a decade.[24]

During the Mongol and Ilkhanid periods, when the leading Twelver scholars were well established outside Iran, orthodox Twelver Shi'ism did make several important inroads into Iran, although it must be admitted that attempts to spread their doctrines by Twelver scholars were aimed at individual rulers rather than at the masses. Despite the barbarity of the Mongol invasions and the havoc that descended upon the Muslim community as a whole, the period of Mongol Ilkhanid rule was marked by a surprising atmosphere of religious tolerance. The liberal-mindedness of the Ilkhanid rulers *vis-a-vis* matters of religion gave way to vigorous debating between adherents of different groups and schools of jurisprudence, more often than not in the presence of the rulers themselves. The scholar chiefly responsible for the attempt to spread Twelver Shi'ism during the Mongol period was Ibn al-Muṭahhar (d. 726/1325-26), known as 'Allāma Ḥillī, who converted the Mongol sultan Uljaytu Khudābanda (reigned 1304-16 AD). After a contest at the Sultan's court between the representatives of the various schools of jurisprudence, in which 'Allāma Ḥillī gave a good account of Twelver doctrines, Uljaytu accepted Twelver Shi'ism and ordered that it be proclaimed the religion of the land.[25] Ḥillī's success, however, was short-lived, for the Sultan soon ' renounced the *rāfiḍī* views and wrote to his provinces demanding allegiance of the people to the views of the Sunna and the Community.' [26]

Now 'Allāma Ḥillī was first and foremost an externalist, ranking as probably

the most outstanding Twelver scholar of his day, and thus it is not surprising that for him the *da'wa* or 'call to faith' that every believer is expected to undertake, took place primarily on the level of Islam rather than on that of *īmān*. Rarely, if ever, do the historical sources mention externalists conducting long debates with each other — or with potential converts — on the necessity of self-knowledge or the gnosis of God.[27] What is important to note here is that for the Twelver Shi'ite, the conversion of non-Shi'ite Muslims to Shi'ism is more important than the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. If the fundamentals of *īmān* matter at all to Twelver externalists, it is not the fundamentals which they have in common with the Sunnites that concern them but, rather, the fundamentals of Twelver Shi'ite belief. For Ḥillī, the most important of religious matters was the question of *imāma*, and it was this concept that fuelled his missionary activities. Ḥillī was chastized severely on this point by the Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1327-28), who declared that Ḥillī's statement to the effect that *imāma* is the most important element in religion 'is a lie by the unanimous agreement (*ijmā'*) of all Muslims, since belief *īmān* is the most important.' [28]

During the post-Ilkhanid period — the era of the 'successor states' — the relationship between orthodox Twelver Shi'ism and the ruling dynasties becomes less clear. Shi'ite sources claim that many of these dynasties — in particular the Chubanids, Jalayirids and the Qara-Qoyunlus – held Shi'ite views, although it is unclear to what extent they were using Shi'ism to gain obedience from their subjects. What is clear, however, is that the brand of Shi'ism they professed was not orthodox : the poetry of Jahān Shah Qara Qoyunlu, for example, exhibits

the kind of pro-Shi'ite extremism or *ghuluww* that was rampant in the area at that time.[29] Orthodox Twelver scholars, however, continued Ḥillī's campaign to take Twelver Shi'ism into Iran via the ruling dynasts. Aḥmad b. Fahd al-Ḥillī(d. 841/1437-38) scored the same kind of success as his predecessor Ibn al-Muṭahhar did by winning over Ispand, brother of Jahān Shah and governor of Iraq from 836/1432-33 to 848/1444-45. Ispand's conversion was also the result of an inter-*madhhab* contest at his court in Baghdad, and Twelver Shi'ism was adopted as the provincial state religion. It is not clear how long this state of affairs continued, but it is doubtful that it extended beyond Ispand's tenure of office.[30] Ibn Fahd was the teacher of Muḥammad b. Falāḥ (d. 866/1461-2), known as Musha'sha' , the founder of the Musha'sha' movement in south-east Iran. The movement's religious views were of the *ghulāt* type and were eventually denounced by Ibn Fahd, who himself is said to have been inclined towards extremism. Another non-orthodox Shi'ite movement that had connections with orthodox Twelver scholars was that of the Sarbidārīds, a pro-Shi'ite Sufi order that existed in Khurasan from 738/1337-8.[31] The Sarbidārīds were a series of rulers who established a 'state' in expectation of the Hidden Imam, al-Mahdī. The Sarbidārīd episode is interesting because it concerns what was basically a Sufi order that turned into a pro-Shi'ite military movement in order to gain power and, as Mazzaoui puts it, 'impose justice through tyranny.' [32] The same combination of Sufism, Shi'ism and military muscle was later to be found in the Safavid order that was, two centuries later, to sweep to power in Iran. The last Sarbidārīd ruler, 'Alī Mu'ayyad (766-787 / 1364-86) wrote a letter to the renowned Twelver scholar Muḥammad b. Makkī al-'Āmilī, asking

him to come from Damascus to Khurasan to assist in the establishment of Twelver Shi'ism. Ibn Makkī was unable to make the journey since he was in prison awaiting the outcome of his trial — he had been accused of heresy — but wrote instead **al-Lum'at al-Dimashqiyya** , an important work on Twelver *fiqh*, and sent it to 'Alī Mu'ayyad with the latter's messenger.[33] The Sarbidārīd ruler's desire to establish Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy has been seen as an attempt to create stability by establishing an organized religious legal code rather than keep his state under the influence of the extremists who had initially brought the dynasty to power but who were, towards the end of Mu'ayyad's reign, proving to be something of a political liability.[34] The Sarbidārīd dynasty collapsed before the plan could be implemented. When the Safavids came to power over a hundred years later they used a strategy identical to that of the Sarbidārīds, and it is interesting to wonder exactly to what extent they were influenced by the earlier experiment.

Ibn Makkī was the leading scholar of his day; that he came into contact with an unorthodox movement does not detract from the fact that he was externalist in outlook and an astute defender of Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy.[35] His opposition to extremism is beyond doubt, as is that of Ibn Fahd, who went on to denounce the Musha'sha' movement. The fact that these scholars latched onto extremists may be seen as a desire to spread orthodox Twelver Shi'ism at any cost. After all, they must have realised that the imposition of their highly legalistic, externalist doctrines would have acted as a natural neutralizer of extremist tendencies. Ibn Fahd and Ibn Makkī, together with 'Allāma Ḥillī, can be seen as what Mazzaoui calls the 'missing link' between the 'three early Muḥammads' and the 'three later

Muḥammads' at the end of the Safavid era.[36]

2.3 Sufism and pro-Shi'ite extremism (*ghuluww*)

The major obstacle to the introduction and establishment of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism in Iran during the Mongol and post-Ilkhanid periods was the existence there of two potent forces that had already captured the hearts and minds of the vast majority of people, namely pro-Shi'ite extremism or *ghuluww*, and Sufism. The already noted tolerance of the Mongol rulers created an atmosphere in which all kinds of religious tendencies could flourish, and from the end of the 6th/12th century there was a veritable explosion of Sufi and quasi-Sufi orders and movements, some orthodox and some extremist but nearly all of them with characteristics that have led them to be labelled pro-Shi'ite.

2.3.1 Sufism

To define exactly the terms Sufi and Sufism, to chart the historical development of the phenomenon, and to describe the many varied doctrines of the myriad Sufi groups, orders and individuals is clearly beyond the scope of this work; the reader should refer to the standard works on Sufi beliefs and practices.[37] Trimingham aptly describes early Sufism as a 'natural interiorization of Islam.' [38] It was:

> ...An assertion of a person's rights to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the source of being and reality, over against institutionalized religion based on authority, a one way Master-slave relationship, with its emphasis upon

ritual observance and legal morality.[39]

In the context of this thesis we can thus see the early Sufi as one who recognises that true knowledge (*'ilm*) is knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), which in turn can be reached only through self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*),[40] and that the emphasis must be on *īmān* rather than on external religion (Islam). As such, it was in the early Sufi that internalism was particularly embodied and expressed. External religion was not discarded, however: one of the most salient features of the early Sufis was their whole-hearted adherence to the *sharī'a*, the channel through which Islam becomes manifest.[41] Early Sufism, then, observed the harmony that is designed to exist between the internalist and externalist aspects of the faith. The designation 'early Sufism' is an important one, for with the passing of time the phenomenon underwent many changes: from being simply a term to describe the individual's sincere and private internalism, Sufism became a blanket expression which covered many different forms of organised 'ways' and 'paths' to the truth. The gradual institutionalization of Sufism is described by Trimingham as having taken place in three stages: from that of the individual's personal submission to God, through that of communal surrender to a rule (*ṭarīqa*), and finally to that of surrender to a person (what Trimingham calls the *ṭā'ifa* stage).[42] With organization came the seeds of decay. As Trimingham puts it:

> Through the cult-mysticism of the orders the individual creative freedom of the mystic was fettered and subjected to conformity and collective experience. Guidance under the earliest masters had not compromised the spiritual liberty of the seeker,

but the final phase involving subjection to the arbitrary will of the shaykh turned him into a spiritual slave, and not to God, but to a human being, even though one of God's elect.[43]

The spread of the Sufi orders across the Islamic world, especially during the Mongol and Ilkhanid eras, and the interaction of diverse cultural and religious traditions meant that innovative practices crept in, corrupting the original aim of Sufism and creating sects and orders that were totally removed from the purely internalist spirit of the early adepts. It is thus that we are able to talk of two kinds of Sufism: mainstream or 'high' Sufism, which remained more or less faithful to the ideals of the early Sufis and was typified by highly orthodox Sunnite orders like the Mawlawiyya, centred in Anatolia, and the Naqshbandiyya, centred in Transoxania; and corrupted or 'folk' Sufism, present in such orders as the Biktāshiyya and the Ḥurūfiyya, whose practices were highly questionable not only in the eyes of the externalists but also in the view of the 'high' Sufi adepts themselves. More will be said about these groups later on.

Sufism had been present in Iran from the earliest times; al-Maqdīsī, writing in 365/975-76 says that in Shiraz, ' Sufis were numerous, performing the *dhikr* in their mosques after the Friday prayer and reciting blessings on the Prophet from the pulpit.' [44] In pre-Safavid Iran (i.e. the Mongol and Ilkhanid era) Sufis were still numerous, only now they were institutionalized into orders and were spread out over the whole country. Orders such as the Kubrawiyya, the Naqshbandiyya, the Nūrbakhshiyya and the Ṣafawiyya — not to mention a whole host of offshoot

orders and sub-sects — flourished openly and enjoyed the spiritual allegiance of vast numbers of people, educated and uneducated alike.[45] Indeed, to consider Sufism as a kind of exotic mysticism confined to a few ecstatic Sufis who found themselves at cross-purposes with their fellow Muslims and who uttered strange sayings from time to time is, in fact, to ignore just how normal Sufism was in traditional Islamic society. Very often, tens of thousands of individuals were affiliated in some way or other to an order in any one of the great cities. During a visit to Shiraz by Shah Ni'matullāh, the founder of the Sufi order of the same name, it is said that more than 30,000 people paid allegiance to him.[46] Describing Azarbaijan, Gilan and Mazanderan as they were in the post-Mongol period, the Iranian scholar 'Abbās Iqbāl writes:

> At the end of the reign of Sultan Sa'īd , the number of gnostics, Sufis and dervishes in Azarbaijan, Gilan and Mazanderan increased greatly: it reached the point where every district had a *shaykh* with his own group of disciples. Since Sultan Abū Sa'īd did not allow anyone to harm these groups, they were left alone and no-one objected to them. Day by day the number of disciples increased. The majority of these belonged to the *ahl-i futuwwa* or the *ahl-i ukhuwwa* : these were a group of ordinary Sufis who endeavoured to spread the exalted principles of Sufism and gnosis (*'irfān*) among the masses, and by refining their own moral characters and strengthening the foundations of spiritual purity and brotherly love that existed between them, reap the benefits of their endeavours. These groups had established numerous *khangāh*, *zawāyā* and Sufi hospices throughout the whole Islamic world thanks to the Caliph Naṣīr al-dīn, who had supported them. The Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was their spiritual patron, considered by them to be the supreme example of *futuwwa* and *ukhuwwa*. From the point of view of *maḏẖhab*,

they were without prejudice or fanaticism, they refrained from harming, killing and stealing from each other but strove to preserve manly morals and characteristics.[47]

The fact that 'Alī is given a special position by the groups mentioned above should not necessarily give the idea that they were in any sense of the term 'orthodox Twelvers.' 'Alī and the family of the Prophet have been revered by Sunnite and Shi'ite alike since the early days of Islam. The fact that most of the famous Sufi orders trace their line of spiritual descent back to 'Alī (often via other Imams) yet were Sunni as far as *madhhab* is concerned proves that devotion to the family of the Prophet and the 'house of 'Alī' is by no means a sure indicator of Shi'ism or proto-Shi'ism. For the Naqshbandiyya, a purely Sunni order, all twelve Imams are regarded as deserving of reverence and even as capable of functioning posthumously as spiritual guides.[48] Among the Sunnites, the Hanafites and the Shafi'ites have always been renowned for their devotion to the '*ahl al-bayt*' of the Prophet, and since it was these two schools of jurisprudence which formed the majority in Iran during the period in question, the widespread nature of pro-Alid (but not pro-Shi'ite *per se*) tendencies is hardly surprising.[49] Similar expressions of devotion to the family of Muḥammad can also be found in the Kubrawiyya, whose Sunnism is not open to doubt: Najm al-dīn Rāzī Dāya, one of the leaders of the order, cites one of his reasons for his choice of Saljuq Anatolia as his place of domicile as the supremacy there of Sunnism.[50] The Sunnism of the Ni'matullāhiyya was also marked, as was that of the early Ṣafawiyya, about whom we shall read more later. In this light, Hossein Nasr's assertion that the introduction of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism was

made easier by Sufi groups with Shi'ite tendencies is dubious; even those orders which did become openly pro-Shi'ite at the end of the period in question, such as the Nūrbakhshiyya, did not become orthodox Twelver Shi'ites – at least not in the sense understood by those Twelver externalists operating in centres outside Iran who were later to bring their doctrines into the country and work actively for the supression of Sufi orders, the Nūrbakhshiyya being no exception.

2.3.2 Extremism or '*ghuluww*'

The *ghulāt* (sing. *ghālī*) may be defined as those who were nominally Muslim but held doctrines that are so heretical as to put (them) outside the pale of Islam. Beliefs such as *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism with respect to God), *tanāsukh* (transmigration of souls) and *ḥulūl* (Divine incarnation in man) formed the core of early *ghuluww*, which has existed since the initial spread of Islam itself. It is with Shi'ism in particular that *ghuluww* has usually been associated, its most salient feature in this respect being the extreme veneration of the Imams — especially 'Alī — which has often manifested itself in the attribution of Divine powers to both him and his progeny. Such doctrines were current during the lifetimes of the Imams themselves, and it is not until the establishment of the Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy in the 4th/10th century that Shi'ite *ghuluww*, at least in its most extremist forms, was disowned by the majority of Twelver Shi'ite *'ulamā'*.[51]

The Mongol and post-Ilkhanid period, particularly the latter half of the 9th/15th century, saw the flourishing of *ghuluww*-inspired popular movements in the Islamic world. The *ghulāt* were especially widespread in north-western Iran and

Anatolia, which had experienced a massive influx of Turcoman nomadic tribes as a result of the Mongol invasions and the earlier Saljuq tribal policy. The conversion of these tribes to Islam was for the most part in name only, and old shamanistic elements continued to dominate their religion. Like the early Shi'ite *ghulāt*, the extremist groups of the immediate pre-Safavid period centred around 'Alī and the Mahdi (the Hidden Imam) in particular. Where the later groups differed, however, was in their 'institutionalization' into quasi-Sufi, militant movements that spearheaded various popular, anti-establishment revolts throughout the period in question, culminating in the rise to power of the Safavids at the end of the 9th/ 15th century. As Trimingham observes,

> Sufi organisations tended to absorb popular movements since this was the only way whereby the ideals for which such movements of the spirit stood could survive.[52]

The 'coming-out' of Sufism, which went hand-in-hand with the decline of orthodox religion (both Sunnite and Shi'ite), and the corruption of much of it into what Nadvi calls 'pirism', may indeed be seen as a crucial factor in the formation and spread of the *ghulāt* during this period: certain Sufi orders — notably the Yasawiyya of Anatolia — were already treading the road to open heterodoxy as a result of the inordinate institutionalization process mentioned earlier, and the absorption of certain features of *ghuluww* would not have been difficult to achieve: the Biktāshiyya are a good example of the kind of admixture of folk-sufism and pro-Alid *ghuluww* that was rampant in the area during the 14th and 15th centuries.[53]

Extremist movements such as the Musha'sha' have already been mentioned, and reference will be made to other important groups in the following section.

To talk of *ghuluww* in terms of internalism and externalism is not strictly possible. As far as belief is concerned, the *ghulāt* cannot be classed as believers in the internalist sense of the word since their preoccupation is with the created rather than the Creator: the cult figure of 'Alī and the Imams are substituted for — or joined in partnership with — God. As far as externalism is concerned, the *ghulāt* were nominally Muslim yet rarely — if ever — obeyed the dictates of the *sharī'a* .[54] Thus, the devotion of the *ghulāt* to the Imams should not be interpreted as a manifestation of Shi'ism in the orthodox sense, i.e. the Twelver Shi'ism that flourished in the hands of the externalist *fuqahā'* outside the Iranian sphere. Neither should the mistake be made of associating all Sufi orders with *ghulāt* extremism: the fact that Sufi orders such as the Mawlawiyya in Anatolia was accepted by the Sunni establishment and was particularly vociferous in its condemnation of the *ghuluww*-inspired revolt of the Bābā'ī sect in the mid-7th/13th century points to the existence of two basic trends in Sufi activity: the orthodox (i.e. Sunnite) mainstream or 'high' Sufism of groups such as the Mawlawiyya; and *ghulāt* Sufism, or folk-Sufism typified by such groups as the Biktāshiyya and, later on, the Qizilbash supporters of the Safavids. It may be misleading to describe the second group as Sufis in the strict sense of the word, since their non-conformity to the tenets of the *sharī'a* was not only a prerequisite of being Muslim in general but also of being Sufi in particular. To understand further the interaction of Sufism and *ghulāt* extremism, we now turn to the hybrid *par excellence* of those two currents:

the Safavid movement.

2.4 The rise of the Safavids

A major paradox in Iranian religious history is the fact that what has been the state religion of the country for the past five centuries, namely Shi'ism with a predominantly externalist tinge, was originally imposed upon the population by a leader who was were neither Shi'ite by name nor externalist by outlook. Nor, strictly speaking, were the Safavids Persians, although the precise geographical origins of the dynasty have still not been conclusively traced.[55]

What was to eventually become a monarchical dynasty with externalist Twelver Shi'ism as its formal state religion began as a Sufi *ṭarīqa* in the town of Ardabil in Azarbaijan at the beginning of the 8th century AH. Its founder, Shaykh Ṣafī(d. 735 / 1334-35) was originally initiated into Sufism at the hands of Shaykh Tāj al-dīn Ibrāhīm Zāhidī (d. 700/1300-01), a *murshid* of Gilan whose daughter Shaykh Ṣafī married. After the death of his father-in-law and mentor, Shaykh Ṣafī became the head of the *ṭarīqa* , which was renamed Ṣafawiyya (the Safavid Order). The major source of information concerning Shaykh Ṣafī, namely the **Ṣafwat al-ṣafā** of Ibn al-Bazzāz, portrays Shaykh Ṣafī as a man of great learning, wisdom, piety and popularity.[56] The Safavid order was highly respected by the political authorities both in Shaykh Ṣafī's time and also during the leaderships of his three immediate successors, Ṣadr al-dīn (d. 795-96/1393), Khwāja 'Alī(d. 832-33/1429) and Shaykh Ibrāhīm (d. 851/1447-8). The Ilkhanids and their chief ministers paid homage to Shaykh Ṣafī, as did the Jalayirids to Ṣadr-al-dīn and the Taymurids to

Khwāja 'Alī.[57] The reverence shown to the order by the leaders of the ruling regimes serves to highlight the general atmosphere of religious tolerance prevalent in pre-Safavid Iran: internalism, so long as it presented no overt political threat, was allowed to flourish and was even actively encouraged. The absence of any political threat from the early Safavid leaders is a reflection of their orthodoxy, both as Sunnites and as adherents of mainstream Sufism. According to Mustawfī, during the time of Shaykh Ṣafī most of the population of Ardabil belonged to the Shafi'ite school of jurisprudence and were followers of Shaykh Ṣafī.[58] It is said that in his entire life, Shaykh Ṣafī 'followed the *sharī'a* to such an extent that in both word and deed he did not deviate from it by as much as a hair's breadth.' [59] The early *ṭarīqa* prized itself on its abstention from any inter-*madhhab* squabbling, preferring to follow those traditions with the strongest chains of authority from the four schools of Sunnism.[60] As far as externals are concerned, then, Shaykh Ṣafī was staunchly orthodox: this explains partly why the *ṭarīqa* did not present any political threat, since any kind of open opposition to the ruling power is anathema to mainstream Sunnism. Shaykh Ṣafī's internalist leanings were mainstram Sufi, his spiritual pedigree stretching back to 'Alī and Muḥammad through a long chain of Sufi leaders which includes such luminaries as Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī;[61] he was also versed in the works of the Persian Sufi poets Rūmī and 'Aṭṭār. Mainstream or 'high' Sufism, in contrast with folk-Sufism or *ghulāt* extremism, precludes overt political or militant opposition to the ruling regime: this also helps to explain the fact that dynasty after dynasty was able to accommodate and even revere the Safavid order and its leaders.

Shaykh Ṣafī was succeeded by his son, grandson and great-grandson, each of whom maintained the *ṭarīqa* in much the same orientation and enjoyed the respect of the Jalayirid and Taymurid rulers. By the end of the leadership of Shaykh Ibrāhīm, the popularity and influence of the Safavid order had increased to such an extent that its leaders were able to act as intermediaries between political rulers and their opponents.[62] The order gained countless more devotees by dint of the role it played as a safe haven from the troubled and oppressive atmosphere of post-Mongol Iran. Under the first four leaders of the order, all indications are that the Safavids were an important conduit for the spread of internalist, Sufi doctrines in Azarbaijan, Khurasan and Anatolia. Neither Twelver Shi'ism nor *ghuluww* seems to have played any part in the order's doctrines, and as Minorsky asserts, 'The Lords of Ardabil are highly respected shaykhs, leading a contemplative life, spending their time in prayers and fasting, and credited with supernatural powers.' [63]

With the succession of Shaykh Junayd (d. 864/1459-60) in 851/1447-48, the Order underwent a momentous transformation, one which is not easy to explain and on which the sources of the time offer little help. The change in religious orientation was dramatic: contemplative, internalist Sufism was replaced with openly heterodox *ghuluww*. Ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī, the Sunnite writer at the court of Sultan Ya'qūb, son of Uzun Ḥasan Aq-Qoyunlu, states that the followers of the Order 'openly called Shaykh Junayd God (*ilāh*), and his son Son of God (*ibn Allāh*)... in his praise they said, "he is the Living One, there is no God but he." Their folly and ignorance were such that, if someone spoke of Shaykh Junayd as dead, he was no more to enjoy the sweet beverage of life.' [64] Junayd's son,

Ḥaydar, was also revered as divine; according to Khunjī, people came from far and wide to prostrate at Ḥaydar's feet, worshipping him as their god and neglecting the duties of the *sharī'a.*[65]

The transformation of the Safavid Order from an orthodox Sunnite Order into the open heresy of pro-Alid *ghuluww* cannot be explained easily in terms of simple religious re-orientation alone. The sudden religious *volte-face* was accompanied by a radical change in the Order's political leanings, transforming it into a militant movement which, in less than half a century, grew in intensity and ambition to the point where it was able to put Junayd's grandson Ismā'īl on the throne at Tabriz. In short, the religious change must be seen in the light of the political change, and it must be concluded that the religious change was no more than a pretext for the political ambitions of Shaykh Junayd. Although history is littered with examples of religion being used for political ends, the case of Shaykh Junayd is of paramount importance here since it represents the very first in a series of steps that led to the creation of the Safavid state and, by extension, the establishment of externalist Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion. It is perfectly conceivable that had Junayd not made his momentous career move, the Order would have remained orthodox and Sunnite, and the advent of Shi'ism as the state religion would have been delayed, maybe even indefinitely.

Junayd became the leader of the Safavid Order just a few months after the death of the last great Taymurid ruler, Shāhrukh (d. 850/1446-7). With the latter's demise, the political *status quo* in Iran and Transoxania was disrupted and

the stage left open for the rival Aq-Qoyunlu and Qara-Qoyunlu dynasties to vie for overall power. It appears that it was at this point in time that Junayd began to nurture serious political ambitions, for as Khunji writes:

> When the boon of succession reached Junayd, he altered the way of life of his ancestors: The bird of anxiety laid an egg of longing for power in the nest of his imagination. Every moment he strove to conquer a land or a region. When his father Khwaja Shaykh-Shah (Ibrāhīm) departed, Junayd for some reason or other had to leave the country.[66]

Junayd was in fact expelled from Ardabil on the orders of the Qara-Qoyunlu leader, Jahān Shah. The Ottoman historian Aşıkpaşazade writes that Junayd's aspirations centred on nothing less than royal succession in Azarbaijan (and, by extension, in Iran proper), thus presenting the Qara-Qoyunlu leadership with an open threat. It was at this juncture that Junayd began to claim descendancy from 'Alī, stating that his (Junayd's) descendants have more right to rule the Islamic community than even the companions of the Prophet.[67] From Ardabil, Junayd travelled through Anatolia to Konya, where he began to publicize openly his claims to Alid descent. It appears that he also engaged in the dissemination of extreme Shi'ite doctrines, a move which angered both the ruler and the *'ulamā'* of Konya, who promptly had Junayd expelled from the city.[68] Junayd moved on to the town of Jabal Mūsā in northern Syria, where extremist Ḥurūfī doctrines enjoyed considerable influence and popularity. In 861/1456-57, Junayd led his followers, formed by this time into a band of raiders (*ghuzāt*), in a campaign against the

Christian enclave at Trabzon. Eventually he settled in Diyarbakir, where he was warmly recieved by the Aq-Qoyunlu ruler, Uzun Ḥasan.[69]

The religious background of Junayd's followers is of great significance if we are to understand why Junayd altered his own religious orientation after the death of his father. The confused and unstable political atmosphere in the Ottoman empire that obtained after the disintegration of the Rum Saljuq state, plus the huge influx of Turco-Mongolian tribes — with their dubious religious doctrines — who were pushed westwards by conquerors from the east, had turned Anatolia into a place where all kinds of religious heterodoxy could flourish. Pro-'Alīd extremism was widespread, and there was a history of anti-establishment rebellion led by charismatic characters with marked Twelver sympathies. Two notable uprisings were those of Bābā Rasūlullāh Isḥāq against the Saljuqs around 638/1240-41, and that of Badr al-dīn Samawna in 819/1416-17: although separated by almost two centuries, both were expressions of discontent, fuelled by extremist pro-Shi'ite doctrines and directed against the ruling Sunnite aristocracies of the time.[70] The ideological and political incompatability of *ghuluww* and internalism can be seen in the fact that the earlier Bābā'ī revolt was opposed by the followers of Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī and his Mevlevi Order.[71] As for Badr al-dīn, although his revolt was crushed, his teachings lived on among the Turcomans of Anatolia, some of whom were later to take up the cause of sects such as the Bektashis and the Safavids. The Bektashis were another heterodox group with great influence in the region; its leader, Hājj Bektash, drew heavily on the teachings of Bābā Isḥāq. According to Tschudi, the Bektashis 'are Shi'is, acknowledging the Twelve Imams...the centre

of their worship is 'Alī; they unite 'Alī with Allah and Muḥammad into a trinity.' [72]

It was to this hotbed of religious heterodoxy that Junayd turned to seek support for his nascent political and military ambitions. The unsettled Turkish tribes of rural Anatolia, with their history of anti-state militancy and their quasi-egalitarian religious extremism, would be ideal *ghāzī* material for the ambitious Junayd. Naturally, to win their allegiance he would have to forsake the quietistic internalism of his mainstream Sufi and Sunni background and espouse the extremist cause: this explains his claims to 'Alīd descent. As Minorsky observes,

> It is possible that having discovered Shi'ite leanings among the Anatolians, he felt that a wider scope for his enterprise would open with his own move in the same direction.[73]

Furthermore, Junayd's aspiration for 'royal' succession was greatly enhanced by his marriage to Uzun Ḥasan's sister. The Safavid leaders henceforth became 'princes of the land', and Junayd's marriage 'became known even in the farthest corners of Rum and Syria.' [74] With this judicious move, Junayd combined what the Iranian scholar Falsafī calls 'spiritual sultanate' (*salṭanat-i ma'nawī*) with 'external Sultanate' (*salṭanat-i ṣuwarī*).[75] It was on this basis that he was able to lead his followers on raids and *jihād*, and to exchange the epithet of *shaykh* for that of *sulṭān*.[76]

Under the leadership of Junayd's son, Ḥaydar, the Safavid Order became

crystallized as a political movement with an increasingly extremist religious colouring. Having inherited his father's title as a mere babe-in-arms,[77] Ḥaydar's education and upbringing became the collective responsibility of the *khulafā'*, men who were drawn from among the Order's tribal following and who acted as a powerful link between the Safavid leadership and those tribes and clans which owed it allegiance.[78] The *khulafā'* constituted what amounts to an informal regency council, whose duty was to take care of the spiritual, military and political responsibilities of the new heir.[79] The rise of the *khulafā'* led the Order even further away from its originally orthodox religious orientation; as Khunjī remarks, 'they foolishly announced the glad tidings of (Ḥaydar's) divinity...they considered him as their god and, neglecting the duties of *namāz* and public prayers, looked upon the Shaykh as their *qibla*.' [80] Ḥaydar's followers became known as the Qizilbash ('red-heads'), so called because of the red twelve-pointed cap which Ḥaydar instructed them to wear.

Ḥaydar had been installed in Ardabil in 874/1469-70 by his maternal uncle, Uzun Ḥasan, who had defeated Jahān Shah and the Qara-Qoyunulu dynasty and established authority over its former domains. The return of the Safavid Order to Ardabil prompted an influx of the movement's followers from eastern Anatolia and northern Syria. Ḥaydar's ties with the Aq-Qoyunlu dynasty were strengthened further by his marriage to Uzun Ḥasan's daughter. The end of Uzun Ḥasan's long and relatively stable reign saw the political situation in Iran take a downward course: Iran gradually degenerated into an arena of rivalry between the many princes, tribal chiefs and military commanders which comprised the Aq-Qoyunlu federa-

tion. Ḥaydar's Qizilbash followers exploited to their own advantage the decaying internal conditions of Iran, and his leadership was marked by extensive *ghazā* activity against the 'infidels' of the Caucusus.[81] Uzun Ḥasan's son, Sultan Ya'qūb, kept his good relations with the Safavids for as long as he could, although the increasingly militant and religiously extremist nature of the Qizilbash prompted him to order Ḥaydar to cease military activity. Ignoring the warnings, Ḥaydar marched on Darband in 893/1487-8; on his way he encroached upon the territory of Sultan Ya'qūb's ally, the Shirvanshah: a battle ensued and the forces of the Shirvanshah, backed with re-inforcements sent on the orders of Sultan Ya'qūb, inflicted a defeat upon the Qizilbash. Ḥaydar was slain and his three eldest sons, 'Alī, Ismā'īl and Ibrāhīm were banished to Fars. After the death of Sultan Ya'qūb in 896/1490-91, the political situation deteriorated even further as a result of the bloody rivalry of the Aq-Qoyunlu princes. Sultan Ya'qūb's son, Baysunqur (896-98/1490-93) was challenged by his cousin, Rustam, and fled to Shirvan for support from his ally, the Shirvanshah. Thus it was that Ḥaydar's three sons were released. The eldest, 'Alī, was established as *pādishāh* at Ardabil. However, Rustam eventually felt threatened by the Qizilbash presence and finally deemed it necessary to eliminate his new ally altogether. 'Alī was duly assassinated and the Safavid Order, now totally in the hands of the *khulafā'*, sought refuge in Lahijan at the court of the Zaydī ruler of Gilan, Kārkīyā Mīrzā 'Alī (883-910/1478-1505). It was there that Ismā'īl, still only a child, was groomed for his future role as active leader of the Order. In Muḥarram 905/August-September 1499, Ismā'īl left Lahijan for Ardabil, accompanied by seven of the most influential members of his entourage.[82] Ordered

to leave Ardabil by its governor, Ismā'īl and his retinue retired to Arjuwan on the Caspian coast. Meanwhile, his *khulafā'* sent orders to Ismā'īl's followers in Anatolia and Syria to converge upon Erzincan the following spring. Sources relate that 7000 followers drawn from the Turcoman tribes that formed the core of the Qizilbash rallied to the young leader's side.[83] From Erzincan the Qizilbash marched to Shirvan, where Ismā'īl was able to avenge his father's death by defeating Farrukh Yasar. Consequently, the Aq-Qoyunlu ruler of Azarbaijan, Prince Alwand, advanced to Nakhchivan and prepared to meet a potential Safavid attack. The confrontation which ensued produced an overwhelming victory for the Qizilbash. With the road to Tabriz now open, the Qizilbash entered the Aq-Qoyunlu capital and Ismā'īl proclaimed himself Shah. By 914/1508-09, when Ismā'īl succeeded in taking Baghdad, the whole country was more or less under his domination.[84]

To sum up: the Safavid Order began as an orthodox Sunni-Sufi *ṭarīqa* and under its first four leaders commanded the respect and reverence of rulers and masses alike. Totally in keeping with its mainstream religious internalism, the Order was politically quietistic and harboured no aspirations to temporal power or kingship. With the advent of Junayd, however the Order was transformed into a militant and military organisation with a decidedly extremist, pro-Shi'ite religious orientation. Under Ḥaydar, the Order increased its military activity until it was possible, with the support of the fanatical and ultra-heterodox Qizilbash, to place Ismā'īl on the throne at Tabriz. In less than half a century, the Order underwent a politico-religious metamorphosis that was eventually to change the face of Iran completely.

Shah Ismā'īl came to power at a time when Iran was dominated by two main religious currents: mainstream or 'high' Sufism; and *ghuluww* or extremist folk-sufism with a strong Shi'ite flavour. The spirit of internalism lived on during this period in the form of the orthodox Sunnite Sufi orders , of which the Safavids were, in their early stage, a prime example. From Anatolia through Iran and into Transoxania, 'high' Sufi orders such as the Mawlawiyya, the Ni'matullāhiyya and the Naqshbandiyya were the main channels of internalist expression. Devotion to the family of 'Alī was as evident in these orders as it was elsewhere, but this cannot be construed as *tashayyu'-i ḥasan* or 'moderate Shi'ism' as some writers have claimed.[85] *ghuluww* came in the form of popular movements and quasi-Sufi orders with highly unorthodox and even heretical beliefs concerning in particular the Shi'ite Imams. Unlike the 'high' Sufis, the *ghulāt* seem to have deemed the *sharī'a* in abeyance, and its laws and ordinances largely went unheeded. Undisciplined religiosity — neither internalist nor externalist — allowed political and military ambition to run riot, and it is almost exclusively from among the *ghulāt* that the popular anti-establishment revolts discussed earlier took place. In the externalist sense, the majority of the Iranian populace was Sunnite, adhering to the Shafi'ite or Hanafite schools of jurisprudence. The rise of Sufism in general, and *ghuluww* in particular, had gone hand-in-hand with a decline in orthodox religious externalism, although the adherents of the 'high' Sufi orders and groups such as the *ahl-i futuwwa* and *ahl-i ukhuwwa* endeavoured to remain faithful to their (Sunnite) doctrines and observe both internalist and externalist aspects of their religion. Orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, as we have already seen, had developed

throughout the period largely outside Iran. Occasionally it had made sorties into Iran in the form of missionary activities by the Twelver jurists to promote their doctrines at the courts of various rulers. Apart from this, the orthodox Twelver Shi'ism of the *fuqahā'* had made little headway into Iran. However, it was to this orthodoxy that the young Ismā'īl and his advisors now turned in order to stabilize their infant state. It is to the arrival of the new orthodoxy and its interaction with the religious currents already prevalent in Iran that we now turn.

1. Both man's indifference to the 'signs of God' and the fact that most do not have a knowledge-based belief in the Creator are referred to many times in the Quran. For example, the phrase "Verily in this is a sign: but most of them do not believe" is used no less than eight times in Sura 26 (verses 8, 68, 103, 121, 139, 158, 174 and 190. One of the most striking Quranic references to deficiency in belief comes in verse 12:106 — "And most of them believe not in God without associating (others as partners with Him!)"

2. The most salient example is the earlier mentioned Banū Asad verse, 49:14.

3. Victor Danner (with W. M. Thackston), *Ibn 'Ata'illah: The Book of Wisdom - Khwāja Abdullah Ansari: Intimate Conversations* (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 6.

4. Nūrullāh Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-mu'minīn* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī- Islāmiyya, 1375-6/1955-57), vol. 2, p. 52.

5. Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr sūrat al-wāqi'a* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1404/1983-84), p. 127.

6. Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpaẕẖūh (ed.), *Fihrist-i kitābkhāna-i ihdā'ī-i Āqā-i Mishkāt bi kitābkhāna-i dānishgāh-i Tihrān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1330-1338 Sh./1951-60), vol. 2, p. 608. This work will henceforth be referred to as: Dānishpaẕẖūh, *Fihrist*.

7. For an illuminating exposition of the Quranic concept of *hidāya* or guidance, see: Daud Rahbar, *God of Justice: A study in the Ethical Doctrine of the Quran* (Leiden, 1960), pp. 91-6.

8. The difference in approach between externalist and internalist scholars may be exemplified by comparing two radically different interpretations of a single Quranic verse such as 56:79, in which it is stated that the Quran is a book 'which none shall touch but those who are clean.' In Islamic jurisprudence, the realm of the externalist, this verse provides the scriptural basis for the rule which decrees that anyone in a state of ritual impurity may neither touch nor read the verses of the Quran. However, the internalist interpretation given by Mullā Ṣadrā embraces the assertion that the 'cleanliness' (*ṭahāra*) mentioned in the verse refers to the purity of heart that is needed before anyone can attempt to acquire knowledge of self and of God. See Ṣadrā's *Sih Aṣl* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1365 Sh./1986-87), p. 105. Since the two interpretations are not contradictory, there is nothing to suggest that they cannot be held at the same time; indeed, Ghazālī, who probably did more than any other scholar to harmonize the internalist and externalist approaches, warns of the danger of favouring one interpretation over the other when both are equally valid. Mullā Ṣadrā is adamant, however, that his internalist interpretation mirrors directly the true meaning of the verse, that that it is not bodily uncleanliness which prevents man from approaching the Quran but rather the 'filth of unbelief.' (*Sih Aṣl*, p. 105.) Ṣadrā's rejection of the externalist interpretation of this verse does not mean that he was in any way against the derivation of jurisprudential principles from the text of the Quran; his argument should be understood in the overall context of *Sih Aṣl* (See Chapter 3 of the present study), which is vehemently anti-externalist but not anti-*fiqh*. The general impression given by Ṣadrā is that rules of jurisprudence can be understood only inferentially from the Quran, thus leaving all verses open to countless interpretations. Examples in which internalist exegesis blatantly contradicts externalist interpretation do occur, such as Ibn al-'Arabī's notorious passage on the

prophet Noah in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam.* Generally speaking, however, there is usually room for accommodation of both internalist and externalist readings.

9. Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, pp. 112-3.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 77-9.

11. M. K. Yūsufī, *Surūr al-'ārifīn* (Tehran, n.d.), pp. 3-4.

12. *ibid.*, p. 4.

13. *ibid.*, p. 5.

14. The date of Shah Ismā'īl's coronation at Tabriz has been a matter of controversy. Khwāndamīr puts the date as 906/1500-01, while Rūmlū reports the accession among the events of 907/1501-02. The latter is the date most commonly accepted by modern historians. See: Ghīyāth al-dīn Khwāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-siyyar fī akhbār afrād al-bashar* (Tehran, 1333 Sh./1954-55), vol. 4, p. 467; Ḥasan Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh: A Chronicle of the early Safavids*, ed. and transl. by C. N. Seddon (Baroda, 1931-4), vol. 2, pp. 25-6; and for the later historians: Ghulam Sarwar, *History of Shah Isma'il Safavi* (Aligarh, 1939), pp. 38-9.

15. See Nasr's article entitled 'Religion in Safavid Persia' in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 7 (Winter/Spring 1974), pp. 271-86, especially pp. 271-3. For a detailed account of the historical events which attended the rise of the Safavids, in particular their relationship with the Aq-Qoyunlu and Qara-Qoyunlu leaders, see: Walther Hinz, *Irans Aufstieg zum Nationalstaat im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1936).

16. Michael M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids* (Wiesbaden, 1972), p. 2.

17. For a brief history of early Twelver Shi'ism and the role played by the 'founding fathers' in the development of its doctrines, see: Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 61-91.

18. *ibid.*, pp. 84, 91, 97, 123.

19. Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, transl. by G. Le Strange (London: Luzac and Co., 1919), *passim.*

20. Qum, Avah, Farahan and Hillali were singled out by Mustawfī as having very bigoted Shi'ite populations.

21. Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, pp. 78, 84, 85, 87, 98.

22. *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 110-11.

23. The manuscript concerned was a copy of *Qawā'id al-islām* by Ḥasan b. Yūsuf al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325-26) found in the private library of one Qāḍī Nūrullāh Zaytūnī. See: Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh*, vol. 1, p. 61.

24. *ibid.*

25. Accounts of the conversion of Uljaytu to Twelver Shi'ism appear in Shūshtarī's *Majālis*, vol. 2, pp. 355-63; in Tunukābunī's *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā*, pp. 269-71; and in Khwāndamīr's *Ḥabīb al-siyyar*, vol. 3, p. 195.

26. Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥla* (Beirut, 1960), p. 206.

27. Tunukābunī's *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā*, with its potted biographies of over 150 Shi'ite scholars, carries no mention of any debate on matters concerning *īmān* or *ma'rifa*, although it abounds in stories of discussions on matters of law and jurisprudence. Shūshtarī's *Majālis*, despite the author's apparent Sufi inclinations, is similarly devoid of any substantial discussion on fundamental questions.

28. Muḥammad b. 'Uṯhmān al-Ḏhahabī, *al-Muntaqā min minhaj al-i'tidāl* (Cairo, 1374/1954-55), p. 25.

29. For examples of Jahan Shah's poetry, see: Vladimir Minorsky, 'Jihan Shah Qaraqoyunlu and his Poetry' in *BSOAS*, vol.16 (1954), pp. 271-97.

30. For a very brief account of the circumstances surrounding his conversion see: Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 2, p. 370. The inter-*madhhab* debate was held in 840/1436-7. Mīrzā Ispand died eight years later.

31. For a lucid account of the historical role played by the Sarbidarids, see: Karīm Kishāwarz, '*Naḥdat-i sarbidārān dar Khurāsān*' in *Farhang-i Irān zamīn*, vol. 10 (1962), pp. 124-224. Compare this with Shūshtarī's account in *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 579 and vol. 2, pp. 366-67.

32. Mazzaoui, *Origins*, p. 67.

33. Zayn al-dīn al-'Āmilī, *al-Lum'at al-Dimashqiyya* (Tabriz, 1275-76/1955-57), p. 5. See also: Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 579.

34. See: Jean Aubin, 'Tamerlan à Bagdad' in *Arabica* 9 (1962), p. 306. Aubin contends that the Sarbidarid rulers, menaced by the extremism of the common people who had been so inspired by the movement, saw that the only way to peace and stability was through religious and social conservatism.

35. For boigraphical details on the two scholars, see: Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-ulamā*, pp. 255-59 (Ibn Makkī) and p. 329 (Ibn Fahd).

36. Mazzaoui, *Origins*, p. 71.

37. One of the most comprehensive, and objective, is Trimingham's *Sufi Orders*, referred to below. The work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London, 1972), is an important one in the field. See also: Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (London, 1975) and Frithjof Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London, 1976).

38. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), p. 150.

39. *ibid.*, p. 2.



40. See Chapter 5 of Trimingham's *Sufi Orders* for an exposition of Sufi doctrine concerning the soul (*al-nafs*).

41. Nadvi quotes Junayd as saying, 'The external path (*sharī'a*) and internal path (*ḥaqīqa*) of Islam are essentially the two sides of the same thing...far from being antagonistic (they) corroborate each other.' See: Muzaffar al-din Nadvi, 'Pirism – Corrupted Sufism' in *Islamic Culture*, vol. 9 (1935), pp. 475-84.

42. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, pp. 102-3.

43. *ibid.*, p. 103.

44. Shams al-dīn Abū 'Abdullāh al-Maqdīsī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, ed. by M. J. de Goeje, 2nd edition (Leiden, 1906), p. 439.

45. See Chapter 2 of Trimingham's *Sufi Orders*.

46. Jean Aubin (ed.), *Materiaux pour la Biographie de Shah Ni'matullah Wali Kermani: Jāmi'-i Mufīdī* (Tehran, 1956), p. 181.

47. 'Abbās Iqbāl, *Tārīkh-i mufaṣṣal-i Irān* (Tehran, 1312 Sh./1933-34), vol. 1, p. 466.

48. Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, the originator of the Mujaddidī branch of the Naqshbandī *ṭarīqa* wrote passionate polemical attacks against the Twelver Shi'ites yet described the 12 Imams as the leaders of all men who would approach God through *wilāya* or sainthood. See his *Maktūbāt* (Lucknow, 1306), vol. 3, pp. 247-8.

49. Followers of the Hanafi rite resident in Qum in the 4th/10th century are reported to have even taken part in the *ta'zīya* or ritual commemoration of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn. See: Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb, '*Az faḍā'il wa manāqib-khwānī tā rawḍa-khwānī*' in *Iran Nameh*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Spring, 1984), p. 424.

50. Najm al-dīn Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ilā al-ma'ād*, ed. by M. Riyāḥī (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), p. 20.

51. The beliefs of the early Shi'ites are treated summarily by Marshall G. Hodgson in his article, 'How did the early Shi'a become sectarian?' in *JAOS*, vol. 75 (1955), pp. 1-13. See also: B. Lewis, 'Some observations on the significance of heresy in the history of Islam' in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 1 (1953), pp. 43-63. R. Strothmann's article entitled 'Ghālī' in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* is also illuminating.

52. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, p. 69.

53. The role of the Yasawiyya in the Turkish Sufi history is an important one. See: Mehmet Fuat Köprülüzade, 'Türk edebiyatında mutasavviflar', summarised by L. Bouvat as 'Les premiers mystiques dans la literature turque' in *Revue du Monde Musulman*, vol. 43 (1921), pp.236-82.

54. Ibn Rūzbihān, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā-i Amīnī*, abridged transl. by Vladimir Minorsky under the title *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490* (London:Royal Asiatic Society, 1957). See pages 67-8 for a brief account of the antinomian tendencies of the Qizilbash.

55. The Iranian historian Aḥmad Kasrawī was of the opinion that the Safavids were indigenous inhabitants of Iran and of pure Aryan stock. However, they spoke Azari, the native language of Azarbaijan. The main point for Kasrawī was whether the Safavids had been residents of Azarbaijan for a long time or had migrated there from Kurdistan. See: A. Kasrawī, *Shaykh Ṣafī wa tabārish* (Tehran, 1342 Sh./1963-64) and also his article '*Bāz ham Ṣafawiyya*' in *Āyanda*, vol. 2, 1927-8. The Turkish scholar Zeki Velidi Togan re-examined the evidence and suggested that the ancestors of the Safavids may have accompanied the Kurdish prince Mamlān b. Wahsūdān when the latter conquered Ardabil and the surrounding regions in 1025. See: Zeki Velidi Togan, 'Sur l'origine des Safavides' in *Melanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1957), vol. 3, pp. 347-57. The studies of Kasrawī and Togan led them to conclude that the Safavids were not *sayyids* and that the alteration of their genealogy to support their claim regarding their supposed descent from 'Alī occurred either during the leadership of Khwāja 'Alī or around the time of the access to power of Shah Ismā'īl himself. The findings of Aşıkpaşazada, however, point to the alteration having taken place during the leadership of Shaykh Junayd. See: Aşıkpaşazada, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman* (Istanbul, 1914), p. 265.

56. Tawakkul b. Ismā'īl Ibn Bazzāz, *Ṣafwat-al ṣafā* (India Office Ms. 1842), p. 106.

57. Mazzaoui, *Origins*, p. 53.

58. Mustawfī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, p. 81 (Persian text); pp. 83-4 (English translation).

59. Ibn Bazzāz, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā*, p. 250a.

60. *ibid.*, pp. 250b-251a.

61. *ibid.*, pp. 35b-36b.

62. See: Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī, *Tārīkh-i guzida*, ed. by A. H. Nawā'ī. (Tehran, 1336-39 Sh./1957-61), p. 675.

63. V. Minorsky (ed.), *Tadhkirat al-mulūk* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p. 189.

64. Ibn Rūzbihān, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, p. 66.

65. *ibid.*

66. *ibid.*, p. 63.

67 Aşıkpaşazada, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, pp. 264-69.

68. *ibid.*, pp. 265-66.

69. Ibn Rūzbihān, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, p. 63.

70. See: H. J. Kissling, 'Badr al-din b. Kadi Samawna' in *EI*, 2nd edition.

71. See: J. R. Walsh, 'Yunus Emre: a 14th century Turkish hymnodist' in *Numen*, vol. 7 (1960), p. 177. Walsh asserts that the Mevlevi order in the 14th and 15th centuries enjoyed the patronage and protection of the authorities and was used by those in power 'to combat the anarchical tendencies of the rural orders, the Bektashis, the Baba'is and the Alevis.'

72. R. Tschudi, 'Bektashiyya' in *EI*, 2nd edition.

73. Vladimir Minorsky, 'Shaykh Bali Efendi on the Safavids' in *BSOAS*, vol. 20 (1957), p. 439.

74. Ibn Rūzbihān, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, p. 64.

75. Naṣrullāh Falsafī, *Zindigānī-Shāh 'Abbās-i Awwal* (Tehran, 1332 Sh./1953-54), vol. 1, p. 180.

76. *ibid.*

77. The sources are quiet on the date of Ḥaydar's birth. Minorsky reckons that he was about nine years old when Uzun Hasan installed him at Ardabil. See: Vladimir Minorsky, *La Perse au XVe Siecle entre la Turquie et Venise* (Paris: E.Leroux, 1933), p. 324.

78. An extensive if only approximate list of the tribes which were the mainstay of the early Safavids may be found in *Tadhkirat al-mulūk*, p. 193.

79. On the *khulafā*, see: Minorsky, *ibid.*, pp. 189-95. Also see: R. M. Savory, 'The office of Khalifat al-Khulafa under the Safawids' in *JAOS*, vol. 85 (1965), pp. 497-502.

80. Ibn Rūzbihān, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, pp. 66-68. *namāz* is Persian for canonical prayer; *qibla* is the direction of Mecca to which Muslims turn in prayer.

81. Ḥaydar led a first raid into the area in 891/1486 and during the following year launched a full scale raid which brought him over 6000 Christian captives. See: Ibn Rūzbihān, *Persia in A.D. 1478-1490*, p. 70.

82. See: Sir Denison Ross, 'The Early Years of Shah Isma'il, Founder of the Safavi dynasty' in *JRAS* (April, 1896), p. 315.

83. Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tawārīkh*, vol. 2, p. 18.

84. See: 'Abbās al-'Azzawī, *Tārīkh al-'irāq bayna iḥtilālayn* (Baghdad, 1935-39), vol. 3, pp. 316-17.

85. See: Annemarie Schimmel, 'The Ornament of the Saints' in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 7, pp. 105-6. Schimmel sides with Nasr in the assertion that Sufism and Shi'ism had, in pre-Safavid Iran, blended into a hybrid that was able to facilitate the advent of the Safavid dynasty. The word 'Shi'ite' is used throughout the article almost always without any kind of qualifying adjective. For example, her statement that 'some of the greatest masters of the Imamiyyah built parts of their system upon the works of Ibn 'Arabi' (p. 106) is both nebulous and misleading. She also evokes the place held by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in the Naqshbandī *silsila* as evidence of the spiritual proximity of Shi'ism and Sunnite Sufism in pre-Safavid Iran.

Chapter III

The consolidation of Safavid power and the arrival of Twelver Shi'ite externalism.

3.1 Introduction

> The care that Chiek-Sephi (Ṣafī al-dīn) took to establish a particular sect, which was so very different from the other Mahometans, was an admirable invention to prevent the people from revolting, through the solicitations of either the Turks, Tartars, or Indians, who are all their neighbours.[1]

Although Sanson was wrong in attributing the establishment of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran to Shaykh Ṣafī, his observation that its introduction was an overt political ploy is a realistic one. As noted previously, when Shah Ismā'īl declared Twelver Shi'ism to be the new state religion, he and his advisors were ignorant of Twelver Shi'ite law. Ismā'īl himself adhered to the same brand of extremism espoused by his grandfather, Junayd. Ismā'īl's poetry, written under the pen-name Khaṭā'ī, reflects this orientation. For example,

> I am Very God, Very God, Very God! Come now, O blind man who has lost the path, behold the Truth! I am that *agens Absolutus* of whom they speak.[2]

A Venetian merchant present in Iran at the time attests to the fact that

Ismā'īl was believed by his followers to be immortal; the name of God was forgotten and only that of Ismā'īl remembered, and the new ruler was appealed to as both deity and prophet.[3]

Given the Safavids' spiritual allegiance to the Twelve Imams, it seems only logical that Ismā'īl and his advisors would adopt a form of Islamic externalism that would be in keeping with their pro-Alid stand, although it is not clear whether they realised how far removed their extremism was from the orthodoxy of the Twelver doctrines they were bent on introducing. What could not have been lost on them, however, was this: whatever the exact nature of its tenets, orthodox Twelver Shi'ism was a Muslim school with a recognised set of principles and a highly elaborate system of dogma that could be applied side by side with an established system of government such as that which the Safavids intended to create. The adoption of Twelver Shi'ism by previous, non-orthodox pro-Shi'ite dynasties such as ther Sarbidārīds (and, to an extent, the Ilkhanids) was proof that the doctrines of the Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy could quite easily be grafted on to such a political system, albeit not so much as a natural corollary of the system's religious orientation as a means of stabilization and institutionalization. For once the Safavid 'revolution' had succeeded, the very elements that had effected its success — namely the fanatical and undisciplined Qizilbash — would have to be brought into check, and a strong centralized government established if the Safavids were to retain and expand their power. Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy would have the desired stabilizing effect, and its immediate propagation was vital if the doctrinal uniformity that was so crucial to Safavid retention of power in Iran was to come about. Furthermore,

the adoption of Twelver Shi'ite religious law would, as Sanson remarked, effectively isolate Iran from its Sunnite neighbours — the Ottomans to the west and the Uzbeks to the east — and thus create a stronger awareness of national identity. Thus, just as Ismā'īl's forefathers had espoused *ghuluww* to attain power, Ismā'īl and his advisors would use orthodox Twelver Shi'ism to maintain it. Ismā'īl's adoption of Twelver Shi'ism must be seen, then, as a wholly political act rather than as a desire to promote the religion *per se.* The author of **Surūr al-'ārifīn** appraises the establishment of the Safavid regime in terms of the 'Mecca-Medina' paradigm mentioned earlier. Muḥammad's establishment of an Islamic society in Medina, he argues, was a 'natural' corollary of the 13 years he had spent in Mecca developing the 'basis of belief' (*asās-i īmān*), without which the social and legal laws of Islam are meaningless. It is worth quoting Yūsufī's words in full, since they enable us to view the Safavid phenomenon in terms of the internalist-externalist rift:

> The idea that there can be a Medina without a Mecca is a Satanic trick (*dasīsa-i shayṭānī*); without true and deep-rooted belief (*īmān-i ḥaqīqī wa rīsha-dār*), the imposition of Islamic laws of jurisprudence is inevitably just another means of harnessing the masses...The whole history of Islam after the death of Muḥammad is one continuous story of the imposition of the hide-bound religion of jurisprudents (*dīn-i qishrī-i fuqahā'*) under the auspices of tyrants; true belief, whose outward expression in Islam is natural and unforced, is pushed to the periphery, or even actively surpressed...As for the (Safavids), they based their sultanate on neither true belief nor Islam, and thus had no choice but to look outside Iran for support, to the *fuqahā'* of Syria and Bahrein, who soon flooded the country with doctrines quite

alien to the vast majority of the Iranian people... [4]

Given Ismā'īl's initial religious extremism and political aspirations, it is highly improbable that he entertained sincerely any ideas of 'creating a Medina' in Iran. What the author does correctly succeed in highlighting is the fact that the introduction of Twelver Shi'ism was conceived as a means of imposing doctrinal unity for the sake of political ends; he also reinforces the notion that orthodox Twelver Shi'ism was, if not actually alien, at least relatively unknown in Iran. More interesting than this, however, are his strictures against the *fuqahā'*, whose introduction of what he calls 'Islam without belief'[5] he describes as 'an insult to the very Imams in whose name they peddled their doctrines.' [6] To describe the religion of the *fuqahā'* as 'Islam without belief' suggests that the newly imported creed of Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy was almost exclusively externalist in nature. To imply that Twelver Shi'ism was alien to the populace of Iran further implies that non-externalism was popular there and was somehow pushed to the sidelines after the Safavid rise to power. Given the fact that Sunnism was the majority schoool in Iran prior to the advent of Ismā'īl, and that the propagation of Sunnite jurisprudence by Hanafite or Shafi'ite *fuqaha* was widespread, it is an oversimplification to suggest that externalism *per se* was alien to Iran. Nearer to reality is the fact that Twelver Shi'ite externalism in particular was alien to Iran; that the new doctrine had to be imposed, very often by brute force, reflects not so much the difference in nature between Shi'ite and Sunnite externalism, i.e. jurisprudence, which is generally accepted as being minimal, as a basic difference in the belief systems of Sunnite

and Shi'ite Islam upon which their respective externalist structures are founded. Had the fundamentals of belief held by the immigrant *fuqahā'* been in keeping with those of the majority of the Iranian people, the change to Twelver Shi'ism would have been merely a case of a change in *madhhab* — of no more consequence, say, than a change from the Hanafite to the Shafi'ite rite or vice-versa. What occurred in Iran, however, was an almost total re-orientation of religious outlook, comandeered by the externalist Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*, whose status as religious scholars was of far greater social and cultural significance than that of their Sunnite counterparts. It is to the evolution of the role of the Twelver *fuqahā'* that we now turn.

3.2 The Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*: guardians of externalism

As was previously emphasized, the acquisition and promulgation of the scriptural sciences by Muslim scholars has always tended to overshadow the pursuit of internalism, thus creating a duality of *naqlī* (narrative) and *'aqlī* (rational) fields of learning. The preoccupation of the majority of Muslim scholars with the externals of religion led to an unintentional undertatement of the fundamentals of belief, so that a rift developed between what I have termed the 'internalist' and 'externalist' facets of the Islamic revelation. Knowledge of self (*ma'rifat al- nafs*) and knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allah*) became the concern of the Sufi brotherhoods and individual gnostics who, for the most part, operated outside the accepted 'orthodoxy', i.e the body of scholars, teachers and preachers who deemed themselves responsible for spreading the Islamic revelation as they understood it. External-

ism has always dominated the official Islamic teaching institutions (*madrasa*) and while no externalist scholar would deny the importance of belief, it has always been the practical commands (*awāmir*) of God which have been emphasized: so much so, in fact, that the term *'ilm*, originally connoting the knowledge of man about his Creator, came to be synonymous with the academic pursuit of scriptural sciences. The rift between internalism and externalism — and, more importantly, the usurpation of the term *'ulamā'* by the externalist *fuqaha'* — was given attention among Sunnite scholars primarily by Ghazālī, whose chief endeavour was to redefine the word *'ilm* and also to bring about a *rapprochement* between *'aql* and *naql*, between internalism and externalism and, by extension, between *īmān* and Islam. Ghazālī's efforts were instrumental in bringing about what may be seen as a minor reintegration of internalism into Sunnite orthodoxy: Sufism, the main channel of internalist teaching, became more acceptable to the Sunnite *fuqahā'*, and organised Sufi orders brought into existence a religious organization parallel with that of the externalist orthodoxy. Although this tended in the long run to accentuate the internalist-externalist rift, it did create a climate in which the two groups were able to co-exist relatively peacefully. No doubt the fact that the vast majority of Sufi brotherhoods prior to the 9th/15th century were Sunnite contributed to the compromise.

In the case of Twelver Shi'ism, a markedly different picture emerges. The vast majority of Twelver Shi'ite scholars have tended towards the narrative sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naqliyya*) and of all the facets of Twelver Shi'ite religious expression it is the scholarly legalistic religion of the *fuqahā'* that has dominated the others in

terms of the respect and influence it enjoys. In this sense it is easy to draw parallels between the Shi'ite *fuqahā'* and their Sunnite counterparts. However, to see the dominance of the *fuqahā'* in the same terms of the internalist-externalist dichotomy obtaining in the Sunnite sphere is a gross oversimplification. The reason for this is that the fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-īmān*) in Twelver Shi'ism contain elements that are unacceptable to Sunnism. The most important of these is, of course, the leadership or *imāma* of the Twelver Imams, which is basically the *raison d'être* of Twelver Shi'ism. So central is the notion of *imāma* to the Twelver Shi'ites, and so all pervasive is its presence in their works and teachings, that the relationship of most Twelvers with the spiritual life developed on different lines from that of the Sunnites: whereas the latter found a channel for internalist expression mainly in Sufi forms of devotion, the Twelver Shi'ites had their own form of compensation for the spiritual deficiencies of legalistic religion, namely the cult of the Imam. Despite the fact that Sunnites and Shi'ites share three fundamentals of belief in common, it is the over-emphasis by the Twelvers on the importance of *imāma* which raises the question: Is internalism in general the same for Sunnites and Shi'ites, and if not, why not? This question will be dealt with later. The predominance of externalism in Twelver Shi'ite learned circles might well represent and reflect, as it does in the Islamic world as a whole, the overwhelming tendency of the common Muslim towards external acts rather than internal, introspective belief and self-knowledge — a fact, as stated previously, that is acknowledged by the Quran and various Muslim scholars. In the Twelver Shi'ite sphere, however, it is the actual status of the *faqīh* in the eyes of the Twelver faithful that has given the pursuit of

externalism extra impetus, for theirs is a role which far outweighs in importance the one played by their counterparts in the Sunnite world.

3.3 The evolution of the role of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*

Generally speaking it may be said that in matters of jurisprudence, Twelver Shi'ism differs no more from the four schools of Sunnite *fiqh* than they differ among themselves. The major difference is not one of content but of principle: although both hold in common the Quran and the Traditions as their main sources of ritual and legal practice, the Twelver Shi'ites differ in that their traditions rely usually on the words or actions of one of the Twelve Imams.

Prior to the 'occultation' [7] of the 12th Imam, the Mahdi, in 329/940-41, the most important activity among the Twelver Shi'ites was the collection and dissemination of Imami traditions, and thus the earliest learned figures, such as Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūya, were *muḥaddithūn*, or narrators of traditions. The occultation of the Mahdi, however, engendered a serious vacuum in the Twelver Shi'ite leadership. Unlike the Sunnites, for whom the Caliph was the symbolic head of the community even when he ceased to exercise any political power, the Twelver Shi'ites had no such earthly figurehead to look to. Their true leader, the 'hidden' Imam, was in concealment, and the longer his absence continued the more the community found themselves in need of a leader to prevent its possible disintegration. The *muḥaddithūn* took on the task of leadership themselves, basing their position on narrations — said to have been received from the Mahdi during his 'lesser occultation' — which determined the role that they were to have during

his concealment. One such narration, in the form of a proclamation issued by the concealed Imam via one of his representatives (*sufarā*), urged the Twelver Shi'ite community to 'turn to the narrators of our traditions, because they are my proof to you, while I am the proof (*ḥujja*) of God to them.' [8] Such narrations are notoriously ambiguous when it comes to defining the exact circumstances in which the *muḥaddithūn* were to be 'turned to.' However, as the occultation of the Mahdi continued, the role of the *muḥaddithūn* changed accordingly and they were able to extend their activities to the point where, by the last decade of the 4th/10th century, the ordinary Twelver Shi'ites were accepting the statements of their leading scholars as the actual statements of the 12th Imam.[9] The *muḥaddithūn* had evolved into *fuqahā'* merely by dint of the prolongation of the occultation of the Mahdi. Prior to his concealment, the Twelver scholars had always consulted the Imam — either directly or via his representatives — on matters of jurisprudence: their chief function was to narrate the traditions of the Imams, and this they continued to do during the early years of his absence.[10] Arguments based on reason (*'aql*) to deduce legal statutes (*aḥkām*) had been proscribed by the early *muḥaddithūn* ; however, the seemingly interminable concealment of the Mahdi forced the Twelver Shi'ite scholars to offer rational (*'aqlī*) proofs for their Imam's existence — which had become a matter for heated debate — and thus men who had been mere narrators of traditions became scholastic theologians (*mutakallimūn*). The change in the role of the Twelver Shi'ite scholar can be seen in the works of Shaykh Mufīd: whereas early Twelver writing like that of Kulaynī was purely the collection of traditions, Mufīd's works were largely treatises written in defence of the *imāma*, in

particular the occultation of the 12th Imam. Furthermore with the passing of time new situations arose in which the laws of the *sharī 'a* had to be applied, and since direct communication with the 12th Imam had ceased, someone had to be found to give a ruling. Thus it was that the Twelver scholars further expanded their role by undertaking *ijtihād* to answer questions of law and thus fill the vacuum created by the occultation of the Imam. Shaykh Mufīd was probably the first Twelver *mujtahid*, although the office was given a definite shape by al-Ṭūṣī.

The main functions of the Imam were considered to be: leading the *jihād*; effecting legal decisions (*tanfīdh al-aḥkām*); imposing legal penalties (*iqāmat al-ḥudūd*); dividing the war booty (*qismat al-fay*); leading the Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum'a*); and receiving the taxes known as *zakāt* and *khums*. As the role of the Twelver Shi'ite scholar evolved from that of *muḥaddith* — narrator of traditions and legal rulings — to that of *faqīh* or *mujtahid*, or giver of legal rulings, the judicial functions of the Imam also began to fall into the sphere of jurisdiction of the *fuqahā'*. For instance, during the early years of the Imam's concealment the Twelver Shi'ite scholars had refused to give themselves authority over the half of the *khums* which was set aside for the Imam, preferring instead to have it set aside in safekeeping until his reappearance. The other half of the *khums*, known as the *sādāt* share, was to be distributed among the Prophet's descendants by each individual himself. From the time of Shaykh Mufīd, however, the *fuqahā'* began to grant themselves authority over the *sādāt* share; Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d.676/1277-78) went a step further by giving himself the right, as a *faqīh*, to deal with the Imam's share of the *khums*, known as the *sahm al-imām*, as well as the *sādāt* share.

Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī also extended the judicial role of the *fuqahā'* to *iqāmat al-ḥudūd* (the imposition of penalities, i.e. by the *fuqahā'* themselves rather than by the temporal authorities). As for the matter of Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum'a*), the question of whether or not it should be performed in the absence of the Imam is an old and thorny one, with ramifications — as I shall point out later on — that extended to the question of temporal authority and the legitimacy of government. Suffice it here to say that the authority of the *fuqahā'* became so quickly established among the Twelver Shi'ites that from as far back as the time of Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa, the *fuqahā'* had been allowed to organise the Friday prayers in the absence of the Imam or his special representative (*nā'ib al-khāṣṣ*).[11] Muḥaqqiq al-Karakī (d. 940/1533-34) was the first to suggest that the *fuqahā'* were the general representatives (*nā'ib al-'ām*) of the Mahdi, although he restricted his application of this argument to the assumption of the duty of leading Friday prayers.[12] The concept of *nā'ib al-'ām* was taken to its logical conclusion in the religious sphere by Shahīd al-Ṯhānī (d. 966/1558-59), who applied it to all of the religious functions and prerogatives of the Hidden Imam.[13] Thus the judicial authority of the *fuqahā'* became a direct reflection of the authority of the Imam himself. It became obligatory to pay the religious taxes directly to the *fuqahā'* as the trustees of the Imam for distribution, and the donor who distributed them himself was considered to obtain no reward from God for doing so. Furthermore, Shahīd al-Ṯhānī extended the range of those eligible to receive money from the *zakāt* to include the religious students (*ṭullāb*) and the *fuqahā'* themselves, who thus became the recipients of the money as trustees and were also able to spend the money on themselves and their circle

of students. Even in the role of defensive *jihād*, Shahīd al-Ṯẖānī identified a role for the *fuqahā'* to play.[14]

Thus up until the time of Shahīd al-Ṯẖānī, the *fuqahā'* gradually developed the theoretical basis of their authority, evolving from mere narrators of the traditions of the Imams into general representatives of the Mahdi and executors of his judicial functions during his absence.

3.4 Conversion to Twelver Shi'ism: the beginnings.

3.4.1 From Jabal 'Āmil to Safavid Iran.

As noted previously, from the midddle of the 6th/12th century the centre of orthodox Twelver Shi'ite learning shifted from Qum, Baghdad and Najaf to areas well outside Iran proper. Ḥilla had been an important Twelver centre since its foundation in 495/1101-02, rising to pre-eminence a century later and remaining the most important seat of Twelver learning until the end of the 8th/14th century. Twelver communities also existed during this period in Bahrein, al-Aḥsa', and in the area known as Jabal 'Āmil, the hill country which lies inland from Ṣayda and Sūr in southern Lebanon. Little is known about the scholars of Jabal 'Āmil before the 6th/12th century, but from that time onwards the picture becomes clearer. In some of the towns and villages there were enclaves of Twelver scholars who handed down traditions from father to son, forming 'learned families' of specialists in *fiqh* and *ḥadīṯẖ*, and attracting seekers of formal learning from elsewhere. There do not appear to have been large schools with permanent endowmnents; rather, scholarly

activities took place in what was almost a kind of 'cottage industry' of the scriptural sciences, with scholars forming close networks through intermarriage.[15] Some of the most important and influential of these families lived in small towns lying on the trade route from Damascus. Mashghara — the birthplace of one of the towering figures of late-Safavid Twelver Shi'ite learning, Muḥammad Ḥurr al-'Āmilī — and Jazzīn were on the main road from Damascus to Ṣayda, and Mashghara also lay near a road running southward to Galilee. Karak Nūḥ, the birthplace of the first major Twelver Shi'ite emigree scholar in Safavid Iran, Shaykh 'Ali Karakī, lay in the Biq'a valley on one of the two main roads between Damascus and Ba'labak. Other centres of learning, however, such as Juba' and Mays al-Jabal, lay on smaller routes and were in fact little more than villages.[16]

The remoteness of the district from the main centres of power, the small scale of life there, and the poverty of its resources all militated against the area being eyed covetously by the rulers of the great cities. Free from the threat of occupation, the Twelver Shi'ite heritage was preserved and allowed to flourish, attracting learned Twelvers from other parts of Syria. Muḥsin al-Amīn al'Āmilī suggests that Twelver Shi'ite scholars from as far afield as Damascus and Aleppo may have found a home there, and points out that the first scholar of any renown in the district, Shams al-dīn Muḥammad b. Makkī, better known as al-Shahīd al-Awwal (d. 786/1384-85), did not receive his *ijāzāt* from local scholars but went to Iraq and elsewhere to study.[17] Another reason for the persistence of the Twelver Shi'ite tradition in the area may be found in the relative tolerance and understanding that existed at the time between the Twelver Shi'ite and the Sunnite

scholars in the area. The possibility of confrontation was ever present, yet the two groups were able to learn and benefit from each other. The 'first martyr', al-Shahīd al-Awwal, a native of Jazzīn, studied under not only Twelver scholars but also Sunnite scholars in Mecca, Medina, Baghdad, Damascus and Hebron. His main work was to clarify the methods and rules of jurisprudence on the basis of what he had learned from both Sunnite and Twelver interpretations of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, maintaining that competent scholars should give legal judgements and that the people should have recourse to them rather than to judges appointed by unjust rulers. This emphasis upon the scholar or *'ālim*[18] in the community was perhaps a reflection of the position of the Twelvers in the Syria of his time, alienated as they were from the holders of power. He visited Damascus regularly and taught there, but it is a sign of the limits to Twelver activity that he could teach Twelver traditions only clandestinely, because of the need for dissimulation (*taqiyya*). Despite his prudence he was imprisoned by the governor of Damascus on account of accusations brought by his enemies and finally executed.[19]

The 'second martyr', Zayn al-dīn b. Nūr al-dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 966/1558-59) came from a learned family in Juba'. His father, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers were all *muḥaddithūn.* Zayn al-dīn studied with his father in Juba', then in Mays, then in Karak Nūḥ. He also went to Damascus and then on to Cairo, where he spent periods of study with a number of Sunnite scholars. He was proficient in all four schools of Sunnite jurisprudence and taught them alongside his own Twelver *fiqh.* It is claimed that he was the first of the later Twelver scholars to write systematically about the transmission of traditions, using methods and terms

of reference taken from Sunnite as well as Twelver Shi'ite sources. To a certain extent, the Twelver scholars of the pre-Safavid period lived in harmony with their Sunnite counterparts, and there was relatively little of the bitter sectarian polemics that were to break out once the Twelvers found a foothold in Safavid Iran.[20]

A study of the works of both Ibn Makkī and Zayn al-dīn reveals that their output was overwhelmingly externalist in nature, and this to a very great extent characterizes the academic bent of the Twelver Shi'ite learned community in Jabal Amil and the outlying areas as a whole. In fact the Twelver Shi'ite internalist was, at this point in time, an exception, and the source upon which the nascent Safavid regime would draw to establish its newly chosen state religion was almost exclusively externalist in outlook. As the biographical dictionary **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** — which I shall survey later — reveals, externalism was to remain the predominant feature of Twelver Shi'ite academic output right through until the end of the Safavid era; indeed it is hard to escape the impression that orthodox Twelver Shi'ism had — and still has — a particular predilection for the secondary, 'scriptural' sciences rather than anything else.

3.4.2 Shah and Shaykh: Ismā'īl and Karakī

The most prominent and historically significant Twelver Shi'ite *faqīh* of the early Safavid period was Shaykh 'Alī al-Karakī al-'Āmilī (d. 940/1533-34), whom Shah Ismā'īl invited to propagate Twelver Shi'ism. Shaykh Karakī moved from Jabal 'Āmil to Arab Iraq quite soon after the rise of Shah Ismā'īl and is said to have visited the new ruler in Isfahan as early as 910/1504-05.[21]

Karakī, in the tradition of Ibn Makkī and Zayn al-dīn , was an externalist in outlook and covered, in his writings, most of the subjects in the field of *furū'* or secondary principles of Islam. Treatises on ritual ablution (*ṭahāra*), pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), foster relationships (*riḍā'*), burial (*jināza*), contracts (*'uqūd*), superogatory prayers (*du'ā wa ta'qībāt*) and various other matters related to the external practices of Islam form the core of his output; the question of *īmān*, self-knowledge and knowledge of God has no place in his considerable body of writings.[22] Karakī may therefore be considered to be the founding father of Twelver Shi'ite externalism in Safavid Iran, and the first Twelver scholar to disseminate Twelver Shi'ite doctrines on such a grand scale. Karakī travelled the length and breadth of Iran, extolling the virtues of Twelver Shi'ism and appointing prayer-leaders (*pīshnamāz*) in each town and village to teach the people the new creed. Such was the height of Karakī's profile that a Sunnite scholar actually believed that Karakī was the founder of Twelver Shi'ism itself.[23]

The suitability of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism for the objectives of the new ruler is easily discernible when one considers the religious orientation of scholars such as Karakī. The consolidation of Safavid power depended on the ability of the new ruler to eradicate all potential centres of opposition. The extremism of the very elements that had effected the Safavid revolutiion, i.e. the Qizilbash, was one obstacle, for once the conquest of Iran was completed the extremism of the Qizilbash lost its political utility and became more of a burden than a blessing. Equally dangerous for Ismā'īl were the twin obstacles of Sufism — in all of its various manifestations — and Sunnism, to which the majority of the populace

adhered. The logical antidote to all of this was Twelver Shi'ism, spearheaded by the *fuqahā'*. The externalist Twelver Shi'ite scholars had not at this point formulated any explicit claims to political authority and thus posed no threat to the new regime. Religious authority also lay ultimately in the hands of the Shah; it was not until the end of Ismā'īl's reign that Karakī put forward his theory of the Twelver Shi'ite *mujtahid* as 'deputy of the Imam', a status which was to confer religious — but not political — authority upon its holder.[24] As A.K.S. Lambton remarks, 'no Shi'i thinkers arose to do for the Shi'i theory what Mawardi and Ghazali had done for the Sunni.'[25] In the absence of any clear, well-defined political ethos, the *fuqahā'* tended to accept kingly authority — although there were exceptions[26] — and, in some cases, even became vehicles for the allegation that the Safavid monarchs were direct descendants of Muḥammad through the 7th Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim. The Safavid claim to politico-religious authority was enhanced by — but did not rest solely upon — their self-proclaimed Alid descent. Descent from Muḥammad and the Imams conferred no uncertain prestige on the claimant, a fact borne out by the elevated position of the *sayyid* claass in the eyes of the masses, both Shi'ite amnd Sunnite alike. Devotion to the family of 'Alī was a phenomenon not restricted to Twelver Shi'ism. The Safavid claim to Alid descent undoubtedly helped to sweeten the pill, gaining wider acceptance among the masses than would otherwise have been possible. However, descent from the Prophet and the Imams did not confer any automatic rights upon an individual or a regime to temporal rule, a fact of which the incoming Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were undoubtedly aware. The fact that they overlooked this not only points to a

lack of practical political theory on their part, but also suggests that the golden and totally unprecedented opportunity that they had been given to introduce their doctrines in the form of a new state religion outweighed all considerations of who should or should not have the right to politico-religious rule. Although state and *fuqahā'* were in a sense mutually dependent, it was the state that enjoyed the firm upper hand. Karakī was an unstinting supporter of the new regime, so much so in fact that he penned a treatise condoning the ancient custom of prostration (*sajda*) before kings, a practice that is highly suspect considering the Islamic view that prostration is reserved for God alone.[27] Karakī's unswerving support for the Safavid regime was well reciprocated by both Shah Ismā'īl and his successor, Shah Ṭahmāsp (reigned 1524-1576); from the former he received an annual stipend of 70,000 dinars to finance himself and his students, while from the latter he received extensive land grants or *suyurghalat* in the form of villages and arable land in Iraq to the value of some 700 *tūmān*.[28] It was, in fact, in defence of his relationship with the Safavid court and in reply to his detractors that Karakī penned his famous treatise on land tax (*kharāj*), in which, apart from wholeheartedly endorsing the authority of the Safavid regime by legitimizing the *kharāj*, he justified his own wealth and proximity to the Safavid court by referring to the precedent set by the likes of Sayyid Raḍī, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Khwāja Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūṣī.[29]

The suppression of Sunnism was not something that could be taken lightly, given the fact that the vast majority of the populace was Sunnite. The ritual vilification of the first three 'rightly guided' Caliphs (*al-khulafā al-rāshidūn*), Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uṯẖmān, was rigidly enforced, with bands of zealous Twelver

faithfuly formed in each town to ensure that people adhered to the new anti-Sunnnite instruction. Karakī is reported to have taken part personally in the antics of these vigilante squads, patrolling the streets with a gang of youths and cursing out loud the first three Caliphs.[30] Karakī blatantly attacked Sunnism from the pulpit of every mosque in which he preached. It is reported that his open cursing of the first three Caliphs had repercussions in Mecca and Medina, where punitive measures were taken in revenge against the Twelver scholars resident in those towns; a group of those scholars promptly wrote a letter of protest to Karakī.[31]

Although all Twelver Shi'ite teaching is, by its very nature, implicitly anti-Sunnite, the kind of explicit attacks made upon the leading figures of Sunnism by the externalist Twelver *fuqahā'* in Iran at the beginning of the Safavid period were virtually unprecedented. The cursing of the Caliphs, known as *la'n*, became, according to a treatise written by Karakī, a religious duty (*wājib*); in another tract the Sunnites were declared impure (*najis*), a ruling which in effect reduced the Sunnites in the eyes of the Twelver Shi'ite faithful to the level of dogs, swine, infidels and other such Islamically-defined objects of impurity.[32]

The nominal conversion of the Iranian populace was rapid, since, as we have seen, it consisted in only a slight change to the call to prayer (*adhān*) and the innovation of *la'n*. It is clear that many who made a formal profession of Twelver Shi'ism continued to retain a Sunnite outlook; this fact is borne out by the considerable support that Shah Ismā'īl II (reigned 1576-1577) was able to call

upon for his plans to re-establish Sunnism as the religious norm some seventy years later.[33] The practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), which consists in masking one's true religious orientation in the face of threats from a hostile majority, had, prior to the advent of the Safavids, been an almost wholly Shi'ite phenomenon. Now, ironically, it was used as a defence mechanism by many Sunnites, for whom the concept was, in theory at least, highly suspect.[34] The Ni'matullāhīyya order, which, save for its devotion to the house of 'Alī, had previously shown no leanings towards orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, suddenly declared itself Shi'ite and entered into what was to be a relatively lengthy alliance with the Safavids. However, the fact tht its teachings remained totally anti-sectarian and basically internalist, in keeping with its Sufi orientation, calls into question the actual nature of its conversion and suggests that it was, in fact, a form of *taqiyya* , effected in order to secure the continuation of the order under the changed circumstances.[35] The strategem of *taqiyya* meant that it was often impossible on the surface to be sure of anyone's real orientation; only a close look at the words and deeds of the individual would reveal his true bent. The famous Dashtakī family of Shiraz, for example, enjoyed prominence as scholars during the closing decades of the Taymurid era and at the beginning of the Safavid era, and swam with the tide in order to protect themselves when the state religion changed. Consequently it was difficult to tell exactly where the family's true religious affiliations lay, especially since, as Dānishpazhūh points out:

The family had combined their status as nobles with a tradition of classical

learning and culture and this had made them exceedingly proud of themselves; yet when the official religion changed, their own religious proclivities weakened as a result.[36]

Mīr Jamāl al-dīn Dashtakī Shīrāzī, a leading member of the family, was thought to be a Shi'ite by some and a Sunnite by others.[37] In his book **Rawḍat al-Aḥbāb**, dedicated to Shīr 'Alī Nawā'ī, he heaps praise upon 'Alī but does not fail to mention the other rightly-guided Caliphs, a feature interpreted by Dānishpazhūh as indicative of the author's Sunnism **and** Shi'ism.[38] However, the fact that while in Herat he gave sermons not only in the Jāmi' mosque and the famous Sulṭāniyya *madrasa* but also in the Ikhlāṣiyya *khāngāh* suggests a decidedly internalist, orthodox Sunnite and probably Sufi orientation.[39]

Many were unwilling to resort to *taqiyya* and were forced either to flee or to stay and face the consequences of their refusal to acquiesce. One such prominent individual who chose to leave his home was the historian, Ibn Rūzbihān . He writes:

A group of heterodox people occupied the land and disseminated *rāfiḍī* views and sectarianism among the people. This has forced me to leave my homeland and choose exile after bidding farewell to my friends and loved ones. So I left my town and reached Qashan where I settled...where the views of the people of the Sunna and Community were widespread, and where there was no sectarianism or atheism.[40]

According to Ibn Rūzbihān, the mainly Sunnite populace of Isfahan did not

accept the 'law of the Sufi'.[41] One European chronicler present in the city at that time describes in graphic detail the heaps of smouldering bones in Isfahan — all that remained of the new Shah's opponents. Five thousand people were reported to have perished.[42] In Fars, members of the influential Sunnite Kāzirūnī family were severely persecuted. Wholesale massacre of opposition groups was, generally speaking, the exception rather than the rule, and in most cases it should be seen in terms of the desire for revenge rather than religious conversion; in Azarbaijan for example, the Qizilbash sought out and killed all those who had fought against Ḥaydar, most of whom were Turcoman.

In his oppression of Sufism, Shah Ismā'īl had a staunch ally in Karakī and the immigrant Twelver Shi'ite externalist *fuqahā'*, for whom the composition of anti-Sufi treatises was *de rigeur*. Karakī's own refutation of Sufi beliefs and practices held that the Sufis were beyond the pale of Islam altogether, a paradoxical ruling when one considers the quasi-Sufi orientation of his paymasters.[43] The harshest treatment was reserved for the Sunnite orders, such as the Naqshbandiyya, particularly strong in Khurasan and Azarbaijan.[44] The assertion made by the author of **Rawḍat al-jinān** to the effect that Shah Ismā'īl crushed all of the Sufi orders is an over-exaggeration. The Ni'matullāhiyya, as we have already noted, continued to prosper, and other avowedly Shi'ite orders such as the Nūrbakhshiyya were tolerated. On the whole, however, there can be no doubt about the hostility of Ismā'īl and his leading *fuqaha* towards the Sufi orders, and their policy of suppression was one that was to be continued by their successors.

It is Shaykh Karakī, however, who towers above all other scholars in the early years of the Safavid era, and it is the rigid, almost fanatical, externalism inherent in his writings and approach that was to set the tone for the future of Islam in Safavid Iran. The author of **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** ranks Karakī alongside 'Allāma Ḥillī and Mawlā Ḥasan al-Kāshī, and asserts that the Twelver Shi'ite faithful should feel beholden to these three figures more than anyone else since it was these three who initiated the spread of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran.[45]

Karakī was the first Twelver Shi'ite scholar to suggest that the Twelver *fuqahā'* are the general representatives of the 'hidden' Imam, the Mahdi. He also ruled that there must always be a capable *mujtahid* present in society for the commonalty to follow (*taqlīd*) in matters of jurisprudence beyond their ken; in this context he also contradicted the 'Second Martyr', Zayn al-dīn, by declaring it unlawful to follow a dead *mujtahid*.[46] Karakī's ruling on this matter, which Zayn al-dīn appears to have been pressured into accepting later on, paved the way for the grasping of total religious authority over the masses by the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* and, by extension, for the victory of externalism over its rival orientations.[47]

3.5 The reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp: the *fuqaha* take root

Shah Ismā'īl's successor, Shah Ṭahmāsp (reigned 1524-1576), who enjoyed the longest reign of all the Safavid rulers, continued his father's policy of converting Iran to Twelver Shi'ism and eradicating all potential sources and centres of opposition. Unlike his father, Shah Ṭahmāsp had no delusions of divine incarnation and took firm and often violent steps to suppress extremism, even though his

Turcoman adherents still venerated him as either God or the Mahdi.[48] Sunnite communities, which continued to flourish even in such sensitive areas as Qazvin, were also dealt with harshly by Ṭahmāsp.[49] Ironically enough, however, one of his chief ministers, Qāḍī Jahān , who twice served under him, was almost certainly a Sunni who adopted *taqiyya* for obvious reasons. Sufi orders, especially those such as the Naqshbandiyya which had not forsaken its allegiance to Sunnism, continued to come under pressure.[50]

Under Shah Ṭahmāsp both the exodus of Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* from Jabal Amil and other regions outside Iran and the growth of externalism initiated by Shah Ismā'īl and his leading *faqīh*, Shaykh Karakī, continued unabated. The fact that Shah Ṭahmāsp wore a thick veneer of religiosity gave added impetus to the establishment of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* as important players on the socio-religious stage in Safavid Iran. Under Ṭahmāsp's orders, externalist Islam was boosted by the closure of opium dens, taverns, gambling houses and brothels; members of his retinue were made to repent collectively; the *fuqahā'* were ordered to 'enjoin the good and prohibit the bad' (*amr bi'l ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*) from the pulpits; vast sums of money were donated to the holy shrines; shaving was forbidden, etc.[51] While it is pointless to speculate on the real degree of *īmān* held by Shah Ṭahmāsp — and, indeed, by the other Safavid rulers — for reasons outlined in Chapter I, it is a fact that all of the Safavid rulers did initiate actions that were, on the surface at least, Islamically-oriented in the externalist sense. The fact that the private lives of the Safavid rulers were littered with open infringements of the *sharī'a* does not prevent some commentators from describing them

as having great piety, a confusion of terms which reveals a basic ignorance of the difference between Islam and *īmān* , and the tendency to accord the attributes of 'piety' and 'devotion' to anyone who affects an open display of his religious inclinations.[52] The externalism of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* in Safavid Iran may not have consciously encouraged the hypocrisy of 'private vice and public virtue' inherent in the behaviour of its patrons, the Safavid shahs; however, the Islam of the *fuqahā'* was almost totally externalist in nature, and they did not concern themselves unduly with communicating the subtleties of self-knowledge and belief to their leaders. Given this, it is not difficult to understand why rulers such as Ṭahmāsp, whose standing in the eyes of the people relied in part upon an external show of religiosity, would favour externalism and its propogators: most of the Safavid rulers gravitated more naturally towards the externalist *fuqahā'*.

Shaykh Karakī's role as chief propagator of Twelver Shi'ite externalism, which began during the reign of Shah Ismā'īl, continued and reached higher levels of intensity during the early years of Shah Ṭahmāsp's long reign. The 'Twelver Shi'itization' of the basically Sunnite populace continued and was given fresh impetus by Shah Ṭahmāsp's exhortaton to the *fuqahā'* to preach. The standard Twelver Shi'ite catechisms were tracts entitled **Dawāzdah Imām**, or 'The Twelve Imams', written in fulsome praise of the twelve Shi'ite Imams and ordered by both Shah Ismā'īl and Shah Ṭahmāsp to be read in mosques and to form the basis of the Friday prayer sermons.[53] A leading member of another famous family from Jabal Amil, 'Izz al-dīn Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al- Ṣamad al-Ḥārith al-Hamdānī (d. 984/1576-77), a student of the 'Second Martyr' and father of Bahā' al-dīn Muḥammad,

also known as Shaykh Bahā'ī (d. 1031/1621-22), travelled extensively throughout Fars and Khurasan, and played an important role in spreading Twelver Shi'ism in the eastern parts of the Safavid empire. He served as *shaykh al-islām* of both Qazvin, Shah Ṭahmāsp's capital, and Herat; he is considered to be one of the first scholars in Iran to encourage the study of Twelver Shi'ite tradition collections there.[54] He also enjoyed a cordial relationship with Ṭahmāsp and his court, and his overt support for the regime was clear since he deemed Friday prayer to be religiously encumbent (*wājib*), and himself led the Friday prayer congregation while in Khurasan.[55] But it was undoubtedly Shaykh Karakī who enjoyed the greatest influence with Shah Ṭahmāsp, and it was his teachings more than those of anyone else in his time that went in the direction of accepting the rule of the Safavids and conferring a kind of legitimacy upon it: in the aforementioned treatise on land-tax he argued that Muslims could collect the tax for the ruler, and accept their share of it from him, even in the absence of the Imam; they should also perform Friday prayers in congregation even if the Imam is not present to lead them. Such decisions obviously were in harmony with the interests of the dynasty; in return, Shah Ṭahmāsp issued a *farmān* (decree), confirming Karakī's self-appointed rank of deputy (*nā'ib*) to the Hidden Imam and according him responsibility for maintaining the *sharī'a* as the supreme religious authority of the realm.[56] Copies of the decree were despatched to all major towns and cities of the kingdom and people were enjoined to follow the rulings of Karakī or face punishment.[57] During the reign of Shah Ismā'īl, both political and religious authority had been vested in the personage of the Shah, who was both ruler and head of the Safavid order.

With the advent of Ṭahmāsp, however, and the necessity that was felt to play down the extremist origins of the dynasty in favour of the new orthodoxy, religious authority was for all intents and purposes stripped from the ruler and devolved upon the *mujtahid*; given the flight from quasi-Sufist extremism to Twelver Shi'ite externalism, the separation of the religious from the political was inevitable and laid the foundations of an hierocracy of *fuqahā'* that would be able to work, teach, and issue religious decrees independently of the state. Ṭahmāsp's *farmān* is of immense historical significance, therefore, since it marks the beginning of what is loosely termed the 'Twelver Shi'ite *'ulama* ' as an autonomous centre of power. Yet it cannot be stressed sufficiently that the *fuqahā'* were in no way invested with anything that could remotely be construed as political power. As noted previously, a coherent Twelver Shi'ite political ethos was conspicuous by its absence, and thus the separation of religious from political authority — i.e. the reinforcement of the false distinction (in Islamic terms) between politics and religion — by Shah Ṭahmāsp did not serve to create a separate power base as far as government and politics were concerned. It is only in the light of the developments of the past hundred years, and in particular the formulation of the concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh* that we can look back on Shah Ṭahmāsp's espousal of externalism and his seperation of religion from state as the foetal stages of current developments in the Twelver Shi'ite sociopolitical and religious sphere.

3.6 Indigenous oppositon to Twelver Shi'ite externalism: the Persian 'aristocracy'

Overt opposition of the kind noted by Ibn Rūzbihān and Sanson to the

forced conversion of the population to Twelver Shi'ism was both limited and short-lived. Nominally, at the very least, the majority became Twelver Shi'ite in a relatively short time. Objection and opposition to the presence and ever-growing influence of the immigrant *fuqahā'*, and to the kind of doctrines they were importing with them, continued in more covert forms, and usually from beneath the umbrella of *taqiyya* .

Relying heavily on the work of Jean Aubin, the Iranian scholar Said Amir Arjomand has highlighted the difference in outlook, background and academic output of what he calls the 'clerical estate' and the 'dogmatic party', the former term alluding to the indigenous clerical notables in pre-Safavid Iran and the latter denoting the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* who came to the country during the Safavid era. Arjomand casts light on the polarization of the two groups with respect to the major positions in the religious establishment and talks of 'a struggle for domination between the two groups.' [58] While it is clear that there was indeed much bad blood between the indegenous notables and the immigrant *fuqahā'*, it is not clear whether we are justified in talking of their inevitable polarization in terms of a struggle. Although the two bodies of scholars were not the most amiable of bedfellows, it is true that they co-existed relatively peacefully throughout the Safavid era. If domination of the religious sphere was to be the lot of the *fuqahā'* — as indeed it so transpired — then it came as a result not of an all-out struggle for supremacy but of the fact that upon the arrival of the *fuqahā'* into Iran, the indigenous scholars were simply not qualified or collectively astute enough to fill the positions that really mattered.

The complex of religious institutions inherited by the Safavid administration consisted basically of mosques, religious colleges (*madrasa*), religious endowments (*awqāf*), and the offices of *qāḍī* and *shaykh al-islām*. These were controlled by the state through the office of *ṣadr*, the most important 'religious' position in the realm and one which tended to be hereditary in nature. The main function of the *ṣadr* was to supervise and administer the *awqāf* and the distribution of their revenues to students and scholars and also to charity. The *ṣadr* was also supposed to supervise the administration of the *sharī'a* as the chief judicial authority of the state, although as Arjomand points out the propagation of religious doctrine and the establishment of doctrinal conformity and uniformity were not the primary functions of the *ṣadr*, which were to remain administrative and largely judicial in nature. The Safavid *ṣadr* was thus in essence clearly an extension of the Taymurid *ṣadr* as the foremost clerical administrator of the realm. The offices of *ṣadr* — there were ten, for example, throughout the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp — were filled almost exclusively from the rank of the indigenous, scholarly 'aristocrats', many of whom enjoyed the status of *sayyid*. This group, which Arjomand calls the 'clerical estate', was Sunnite prior to the Safavid revolution, and was engaged mostly in administrative duties and judicial and religious functions. With the advent of Shah Ismā'īl, this group professed Twelver Shi'ism — nominally or otherwise — and entered the service of the Safavid rulers.

The cultural outlook of the Persian religious administrators was, as Arjomand points out, a fairly broad one, unlike that of the immigrant Twelver *fuqahā'* whose *forte* was, above everything else, the scriptural sciences. The Persian clerics

did not limit themselves to the scriptural sciences; indeed, in many cases they had had precious little knowledge of *fiqh*, Sunnite or Twelver Shi'ite. Instead they favoured philosophy, grammar and logic, mathematics, astronomy, literature and poetry; in general they can be said to have championed the rational (*'aqlī*) rather than the narrational (*naqlī*) sciences.[59] The Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were different from the Persian clerics in numerous respects. Having spent centuries in isolated hamlets in Arab lands as the religious leaders of minority Twelver communities, advising them on matters of rite and ritual and keeping alive the traditions of the Imams and, by extension, Twelver Shi'ism itself, they lacked the broad administrative, financial and cultural base enjoyed by the Persian clerical class. Arjomand's assertion that the outlook of the Twelver *fuqahā'* (whom he erroneously refers to as *'ulamā'*) was 'strictly religious' is totally misleading and stems from his failure — and in this he is not alone — to differentiate between internalism and externalism.[60] The outlook of the Twelver Shi'ite scholars who hailed from Arab Iraq, Syria and Bahrein was strictly externalist, i.e. they were versed first and foremost in the narrational (*naqlī*) or what I have termed scriptural sciences of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* and it was this particular facet of the Islamic revelation that they emphasized above everything else in their writings and teaching. As Arjomand points out, the geographical factor is of crucial importance in understanding the cultural orientation of the Twelver *fuqahā'*: years of relative isolation, plus the tremendous legacy of persecution as a minority sect, go a long way to explaining why the scriptural sciences were so prized among those holding Twelver Shi'ite doctrines. The sayings of the Imams form the life source of the Twelver Shi'ite belief system, and

in times of oppression it was only through the preservation and promulgation of the traditions that Twelver Shi'ism could survive: as we have already seen, the first Twelver Shi'ite scholars were *muḥaddithūn*, and the collection, collation and transmission of Twelver Shi'ite traditions has understandably been of greater emotional importance than holds true in the case of the Sunnite traditions. Yet this is not the only factor. What Arjomand and other scholars of Twelver Shi'ism have failed to do is to recognise the importance of the *īmān*/Islam dichotomy and to realise that the overwhelming preponderance of strictly externalist interests among Twelver Shi'ite scholars is a reflection of the nature of Twelver Shi'ism itself, and not merely a corollary of geographical or sociopolitical constraints. This will be elaborated upon in sections 3.8 and 3.9 of this chapter.

Given the nature of the office of *ṣadr* and the background of its previous incumbents, it is clear that the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were not suited to the post; out of the ten men who served as *ṣadr* during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp, only one was a Twelver *faqīh*. The post of *shaykh al-islām*, or chief religious dignitary, of each city was more in keeping with the interests and abilities of the immigrant *fuqahā'*, however, and it was these positions that they began to occupy. Also, their knowledge of Twelver doctrine and ritual made them the obvious choices for the posts of *mudarris* (teacher) in the colleges and *pīshnamāz* and *khaṭīb* (prayer leader and preacher) in the mosques. In short, then, in the offices of *shaykh al-islām, mudarris, khaṭīb* and *pīshnamāz*, the Twelver *fuqahā'* were accommodated in Safavid society and were in a position to play an extremely important part in the spread of orthodox Twelver Shi'ism among the Iranian population. Those who

attained the rank of *mujtahid*, and could command the obedience in matters of rite and ritual of the Twelver masses, were in an even better position to make their influence felt.

The polarity between the Persian clerical class and the Twelver Shi'ite immigrants may be seen as a clash of outlook between *ṣadr* and *faqīh* or, more topically, between *ṣadr* and *mujtahid*, for the first sign of mutual antipathy between the two groups came in the form of a *contretemps* between the eminent Persian noble, Mīr Ghiyāth al-dīn Manṣūr al-Dashtakī al-Shīrāzī (d.949/1542-43) and the *khātim al-mujtahidīn*, Shaykh 'Alī Karakī. The controversy was emblematic of the fundamental unease with which the two groups viewed each other.

Ghiyāth al-dīn, one of whose titles was 'Seal of the Philosophers' (*khātim al-ḥukamā'*), was an expert in the rational sciences and was later to exert through his writings a considerable influence on no less a personage than Mullā Ṣadrā. Ghiyāth al-dīn held the office of *ṣadr* jointly with Mīr Ni'matullāh Ḥillī, a student and adversary of Karakī, from 935/1528-29 until 938/1531-32.[61] His difference in outlook from that of Shaykh Karakī was compounded by his total lack of accomplishment in the field of *fiqh*, and it was against the elevation of the *fuqahā'* that he fulminated. One case in question concerned the decision taken by Shaykh Karakī while in Shiraz to realign the *qibla*, which he claimed was out of true. Ghiyāth al-dīn, who had not yet risen to the position of *ṣadr*, objected strongly, saying that the determination of the correct angle at which to stand in prayer in order to face Mecca was a task for a mathematician and not a *faqīh*. Smarting at this affront,

Karakī sent a note to Ghiyāth al-dīn in which he quoted from the Quran:

> "The fools among the people will say: 'What hath turned them from the Qibla to which they were used?' Say: to God belong both East and West: He guideth whom He will to a Way that is straight." [62]

To which Ghiyāth al-dīn, also quoting from the Quran and not wishing to be outwitted, replied:

> "Even if thou wert to bring to the people of the Book all the signs (together) they would not follow thy Qibla; nor art thou going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If thou after the knowledge hath reached thee, wert to follow their (vain) desires — then wert thou indeed (clearly) in the wrong." [63]

The verbal sallying of Shaykh Karakī and Ghiyāth al-dīn, ostensibly over the question of the *qibla*, highlights both the basic difference in outlook of the two factions and the resolve shown by each group to go its own way and not sell out to the opposition. The hostility between Karakī and Ghiyāth al-dīn came to the boil during Shaykh Karakī's second long sojourn in Iran, at which time Ghiyāth al-dīn had become *ṣadr*. This time a fierce dispute ensued between the two in the presence of Shah Ṭahmāsp himself. The Shah saw fit to back Karakī, who eventually influenced the ruler into dismissing Ghiyāth al-dīn from the post of *ṣadr*.[64] As Ṭahmāsp himself writes:

> At this time learned controversy arose between the Mujtahid of the Age, Shaykh 'Alī b. 'Abd al-'Alī (al-Karakī) and Mīr Ghiyāth al-dīn Manṣūr, the *ṣadr*. Even though the Mujtahid of the Age was triumphant, they did not acknowledge his *ijtihād*, and were bent on hostility. We took note of the side of Truth, and affirmed him in *ijtihād*.[65]

Ṭahmāsp's later dismissal of Ghiyāth al-dīn from the post of *ṣadr* was another of the seals of approval given to the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* and the externalist cause. The office of *ṣadr* was, in keeping with the wishes of Shaykh Karakī, conferred upon one Mīr Mu'izz al-dīn Muḥammad al-Iṣfahānī, whom the author of **Tārīkh-i 'Ālam-ārā-i 'Abbāsī** describes as a 'paragon of scholarship and a practical man.' [66] Karakī's influence on Ṭahmāsp continued after his death in 940/1533-34, for in 942/1535-36 a student earlier recommended by Karakī, Mīr Asadullāh Shūshtarī, was appointed *ṣadr* and held the office until his death some twenty years later. However admirable Karakī may have been as an individual to Shah Ṭahmāsp, it was obviously the forceful — and, for the Safavid regime, politically useful — nature of his doctrine and rulings that pleased the ruler. After Karakī's death, a Persian cleric, Amīr Niẓām al-dīn 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Ḥusaynī al-Jurjānī, who was versed in both the rational and narrational sciences and had served at the court of Sultan Ḥusayn Bāyqarā in Herat, came to the court of Ṭahmāsp and requested that the Shah confer upon him the status of chief *mujtahid*; Ṭahmāsp refused, adding that he wanted a *mujtahid* from Jabal 'Āmil only.[67] Both Karakī's son and grandson, externalists in their own right, rose to prominence during the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp, as did many of Karakī's students

and proteges , and many of the offices of *shaykh al-islām* went to eminent *fuqahā'* from Jabal 'Āmil.[68]

It must be noted at this point that the rise to prominence of the *fuqahā'* was not synonymous with a decline in popularity of the Persian clerical class in the eyes of Shah Ṭahmāsp. True, there was a certain amount of displacement as posts such as *shaykh al-islām, mudarris* and *pīshnamāz* — all crucial to the effective spread of Twelver Shi'ism — were 'won' for the Twelver *fuqahā'* by Shaykh Karakī; however, the post of *ṣadr* was to remain primarily in the hands of the Persian aristocrat-scholars, and the reverence shown to this class — many of whom held the status of *sayyid* —by Ṭahmāsp showed no signs of weakening.[69] Ghiyāth al-dīn, for example, despite being dismissed from the office of *ṣadr* in accordance with the wishes of Shaykh Karakī, remained a favourite of Shah Ṭahmāsp, who wrote an affectionate letter to him in Shiraz, showered him with gifts and gave him an important administrative positon with responsibility for appointing and dismissing judges in the province of Fars.[70] Ṭahmāsp patronized both Persian cleric and Twelver Shi'ite *faqīh* and preserved a balance between them which enabled them to co-exist relatively peacefully. Arjomand's description of the relationship between the two groups as a struggle for domination smacks rather of overstatement.

In his otherwise penetrating study of Twelver Shi'ism in Safavid and Qajar Iran, **The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam**, Arjomand makes a number of sweeping generalizations that tend to obscure some important points. His black-and-white portrayal of what he calls the 'clerical estate' versus the 'dogmatic party'

i.e. the Persian cleric/scholars versus the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* connotes a clash between two tightly delineated ideological domains, with no scope for the overlapping of interests and ideas and the vacillations in orientation that undoubtedly occur among Muslim scholars as a result of the fluid nature of belief and adherence to Islam. Not only is it a gross misrepresentation to portray the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* as being engaged in in the pursuit of 'strictly religious' knowledge, while the 'clerical estate' were engaged in the 'rational sciences' — as though religion were synonymnous with *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, and the pursuit of philosophy and theosophy were somehow removed from the sphere of religion — it is an oversimplification to imagine that the two groups were as distinct in religious orientation as Arjomand makes them out to be. It is a fact that the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* became the teachers of many of the Persian clerics at a very early stage; at the request of Ṭahmāsp, students were sent abroad to Syria, eventually to join the ranks of the indigenous scholars studying in Iranian centres of learning under the immigrant *fuqahā'*. Mīr Mu'izz al-dīn Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, who succeeded Ghiyāth al-dīn as *ṣadr*, was a member of the Persian clerical class yet was a student and protege of Karakī. And Mīr Abū al-Walī, a notable *sayyid* from Shiraz who administered the shrine at Ardabil under Shah Ṭahmāsp and served as *ṣadr* under Shah 'Abbās I, was an expert in *fiqh* and ' a fanatical Shi'ite.' [71] The Persian clerics also proved much less unbending than the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* in that they were more open to the assimilation of alien ideas and changes in orientation, even though on occcasions this may have been out of expedience rather than sincere personal desire. Shams al-dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Khafrī Shīrāzī (d.935/1528-

29 or 951/1544-45), an erstwhile Sunnite and student of Ṣadr al-dīn Muḥammad Dashtakī Shīrāzī (d.903/1497-98)who wrote treatises on gnosis (*'irfān*) in the Illuminationist or *ishrāqī* vein had no interest in either dissimulation (*taqiyya*) or exile; in reply to his concerned son-in-law, who was horrified at the thought of being forced to curse the first three Caliphs, he is reported to have said,'Go ahead and curse them — after all they were only three wretched Arabs!' [72] When Shah Ismā'īl took Azarbaijan and Shirvan and, as a result, many Sunnite *fuqahā'* and men of the pen took to their heels, Kashan was said to be left without either *qāḍī* or *faqīh*. Khafrī, who was resident in Kashan at that time, was besieged with people asking him questions on points of the new jurisprudence. Khafrī, despite having no knowledge whatsoever of *fiqh* — and especially of the Twelver Shi'ite variety — began to answer as he thought fit using pure guesswork. When Shaykh Karakī came to Kashan, he saw that Khafrī's rulings were consonant with Twelver Shi'ite *fiqh* and promptly conferred upon him the title of deputy (*nā'ib*), to act as prayer leader and *muftī* (giver of jurisprudential rulings) in Karakī's absence.[73] As Arjomand rightly asserts, it was possible for a Persian cleric to become Twelver Shi'ite and retain his non-externalist outlook; however it was not possible — by dint of the very nature of the new religion — for a Persian cleric to 'capture', as Arjomand puts it, a post such as that of *shaykh al-islām* from the so-called 'dogmatic party' and a remain a non-externalist as far as the dictates of the post were concerned. For this reason the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* and their externalist doctrines were able to make an impression on the crucial posts of *shaykh al-islām*, *pīshnamāz* and *mudarris*, all of which were eventually theirs for the taking.

Another impresion given by Arjomand which must be dispelled here is that if the interests of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were externalist (i.e. 'religious' in Arjomand's parlance) then those of the Persian clerical class were internalist. It is a fact that the truly overwhelming majority of Twelver Shi'ite scholars were externalists, with no academic interests other than *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*; this is borne out, as we shall shortly see, by all of the major biographical dictionaries covering the scholars of the Safavid period. Iskandar Munshī's brief but revealing account of early Safavid *sayyids/ṣadrs* and *shaykhs*/theologians is divided roughly on the Persian cleric/ Arab Twelver Shi'ite *faqīh* basis and serves as an important source for Arjomand's findings. In it we see that, indeed, the Persian cleric/*ṣadr* class, the majority of whom were *sayyids*, pursued for the most part the rational (*'aqlī*) rather than the narrational (*naqlī*) sciences, with philosophy and theosophy (*ḥikma*) being the major trends. However this does not necessarily mean that the Persian clerical class held any kind of monopoly on internalism; although major internalist scholars such as Ghazālī and Mullā Ṣadrā were versed in philosophy and *ḥikma*, philosophy and *ḥikma* do not automatically connote internalism. Ths we can say that the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* — externalists — entered an arena that was for the most part non-externalist in religious orientation and, as far as the Twelver Shi'ite brand of externalism is concerned, almost totally alien. Opposition centred initially not upon the internalist/externalist dichotomy directly but upon one of its side-effects: the elevation of the *fuqahā'* to a level that was perceived as being unwarranted by their actual status. The rise to prominence of the *fuqahā'* under the protection and patronage of the ruler, and their usurpation of the terms *'ilm*

and *'ulamā'* to describe themselves and their work, had delivered a serious blow to the religious permissiveness that had prevailed prior to the advent of the Safavids. And although the non-externalism typified by the pursuits of the Persian clerics and other indigenous scholars continued to flourish, the attacks upon Sunnism and certain strains of extremism must have brought it home that religious liberty was in danger of being gradually eroded away. Even before the end of Shah Ṭahmāsp's reign a leading historian and member of the Persian clerical class noted that the 'ignorant (*juhalā'*) were being turned into the learned (*fuḍalā'*) and the learned accorded the status of the ignorant,' and that:

> Most of his (Ṭahmāsp's) domains became devoid of men of excellence and knowledge, and filled with men of ignorance; and only a few men of (true) learning are to be found in the entire realm of Iran.[74]

3.7 Shah Ismā'īl II to Shah 'Abbās I

The arrival of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* in Iran, the indoctrination of the indigenous students and scholars in the new creed, and the assimilation of members of the Persian clerical class into the ranks of the Twelver *fuqahā'* all continued throughout the reign of the quasi-Sunnite Ismā'īl II (1576-77) and the ineffectual Shah Muḥammad Khudābanda (1577-87). That these rulers were bent on continuing their forefathers' policy of supporting the externalist cause, and that the Twelver *fuqahā'* still saw fit to endorse Safavid rule, is clear from the fact that Shaykh Karakī's son, Shaykh 'Alī, presided over the coronation ceremony of both

Ismā'īl II and Shah Muḥammad, laying before them the 'rug of kingship' (*qālīcha-i salṭanat*) to mark their ascension.[75] Shah Muḥammad's approval of the externalist cause was reflected in socially-oriented acts of external religious importance: like his father, Shah Ṭahmāsp, he repented publicly and issued edicts forbidding the consumption of wine and the pursuits of pastimes prohibited by the sacred law.[76] By the same token, Shah Muḥammad revered the Persian clerical class as much as Ṭahmāsp had done, thereby keeping a balance — be it purposeful or incidental — between the two groups. Shah Muḥammad's apparent eagerness to please all of those around him also facilitated a recrudescence of Qizilbash inter-tribal factionalism and an increase in their demands on the state. It was the resurgence of Qizilbash power, thanks to the laxity and largesse of Shah Muḥammad, that led Shah 'Abbās I to take action against both the Qizilbash and the more unruly of the Sufi elements and by doing so confirm his even greater support for the externalist *fuqahā'*.

Shah Ismā'īl II is the great anomaly of the Safavid dynasty in that he openly showed a predilection for Sunnism and was antagonistic towards the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*. Reluctant to speak ill of the Prophet's wife, 'Āisha, who was reviled by the Twelvers because of her hostility towards 'Alī, or of the first three Caliphs, Shah Ismā'īl II gave his support to a number of scholars who were suspected of holding pro-Sunnite sympathies. One such scholar was Mīrzā Makhdūm Shīrāzī, a *sayyid* of the Ṣayfī line and a descendant of Shah Ṭahmāsp's minister, Qāḍī Jahān, himself a closet Sunnite. Mīrzā Makhdūm gave sermons (*wa'ẓ*) at the Ḥaydarīyya mosque in the capital, Qazvin, and drew large crowds to listen to them. Under Shah Ismā'īl

II, the office of *ṣadr* was divided and Mīrzā Makhdūm received half of it.[77] Since he later made no effort to conceal his Sunnite tendencies, he was eventually dismissed from office.[78] Mawlānā Mīrzā Jān Shīrāzī was another of Shah Ismā'īl II's favoured scholars: an expert in the rational sciences, he too enjoyed great influence in his native town of Shiraz. Relying on the support of the ruler he was able to flaunt his Sunnism openly, with the result that after the death of the Shah he was forced to leave Iran for the more liberal atmosphere of the Indian sub-continent.[79]

Shah Ismā'īl II was particularly opposed to the ritual cursing (*la'n*) of the three Caliphs and other enemies of the Twelver Shi'ites, and decreed that the practice be abandoned. Orders were given that anyone who uttered the ritual cursing would be severely punished. Furthermore, the Shah also paid money to anyone who could sincerely say that they had never cursed the Caliphs. Several of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were banned from entering the Shah's presence, and the works of the rabidly anti-Sunnite *mujtahid*, Mīr Sayyid Ḥusayn, were impounded.[80] Eulogies of the house of 'Alī were forbidden to be recited in mosques, a measure that incensed the fanatical Qizilbash among others, who were given to plastering the doors and walls of the mosques with pro-Alid love poetry.[81] Ismā'īl II's attempt to re-establish Sunnism had to be abandoned in the face of strong Qizilbash opposition.

The Shah Ismā'īl II affair is interesting for it corroborates the assertion that a considerable number of people had had recourse to *taqiyya* in order to conceal their Sunnite beliefs. Also worthy of note is the fact that those leading

scholars who proclaimed their Sunnite proclivities and supported Ismā'īl II were non-externalist in religious orientation and of Persian origin; the joint holders of the office of *ṣadr* during Shah Ismā'īl II's short reign — Mīrzā Makhdūm Shīrāzī and Shah 'Ināyatullāh Iṣfahānī— were both scions of well-known aristocratic families. On the other hand, Shah Ismā'īl II's failure to re-establish Sunnism serves as an indicator of the extent to which the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* had made their creed acceptable in Iran, and also of the influence that the *fuqahā'* as individuals were capable of exerting.[82]

The major objectives held by the first Safavid ruler, Ismā'īl I — namely the subduction of Qizilbash extremism, Sunnism and Sufism, and the establishment of Twelver Shi'ite externalism — were pursued with no uncertain success by his great-grandson, Shah 'Abbās I (1587-1629), arguably the most politically astute and strategically brilliant of all the Safavid rulers. Shah 'Abbās introduced centralizing reforms of a sweeping nature, one of which focused on the army; introducing a new corps of mostly Georgian slave-soldiers (*ghulām*), he altered the composition of the military forces of his empire and reorganised the Qizilbash in a way that detracted considerably from their former power and influence.[83] Shah 'Abbās's severe determination to ensure that loyalty and obedience to the Shah rather than membership of the Qizilbash was the only criterion for advancement also manifested itself in his massacre of a large contingent of seasoned adherents of the Safavid Order known as the 'old Sufis of Lahijan.' They were accused of treason and of failing to place submission to the will of the leader (*murshid*) of the Order, i.e. Shah 'Abbās himself, before all worldly interests.[84] That his attack

on their loyalty was merely a pretext for a massacre becomes obvious when one considers how the Shah had exploited the blind loyalty of his Turcoman adherents in order to use them in menial jobs around his household and court, and how, in any case, he had been moving away from the concept of loyalty on the basis of the *murshid - murīd* relationship towards the ideal of 'love for the Shah'(*shāhsiwānī*).[85] Shah 'Abbās's rejection of extremism was also reflected in his suppression of the Nuqtawiyya, a highly unorthodox school of thought akin to Ḥurūfism.[86] Although he himself had taken a personal interest in the heretical Nuqtawī doctrines, the dangers that it, like any extremist creed, held soon became apparent to him and so he proceeded to extirpate the Nuqtawī leaders and their adherents. He also brought a virtual end to the Ni'matullāhiyya Order in Iran, although not so much by brute force as by disdain and the withholding of royal patronage. Prior to the reign of Shah 'Abbās, the Order had enjoyed cordial relations with the regime and had become a conspicuous element in the Persian aristocracy. Under Shah 'Abbās, however, it began to sink into oblivion. The Shah, ever wary of the existence of potential centres of power, seems to have fulminated against the Order on account of their being arguably the most highly organized of the Sufi orders rather than any inherent dislike for their obviously internalist orientation; this is clear when one considers his own alleged penchant for the unorthodox *a la* Nuqtawiyya and the support he gave to individual, non-Order affiliated gnostics.[87] 'Abbās also continued the persecution of Sunnites, especially at the outset of his reign when Sunnism was still strong in certain areas of the country;[88] the contempt shown by the monarch for his co-religionists stands in stark contrast with the respect he

showered on non-Muslims.[89] These basic contradictions — the public suppression and private espousal of unorthodox beliefs; the suppression of Sufi Orders and the patronization of individual gnostics; intolerance of fellow Muslims (Sunnites) and tolerance towards non-Muslims — show that Shah 'Abbās I cut his religious coat according to his political cloth. Capable at times of acts of devastating cruelty, Shah 'Abbās nevertheless sported what was at times an almost excessive zeal for displays of religiosity and humility. On one occasion he is said to have made one of his *fuqahā'* ride ahead of him in public while he followed on foot, a demonstration designed to portray him as a humble follower and respecter of the faith. He twice visited the shrine of Imam Riḍā in Mashhad on foot, endowing it with land, property and personal belongings.[90] Similar attention was paid to the shrines in Najaf and Karbala. To be generous to Shah 'Abbās one may conclude that he, in true externalist manner, held the erroneous view that *īmān* is best gauged by actions (*a'māl*), and that the more florid and expansive the outward display, the greater one's status as a believer (*mu'min*) becomes. A more realistic view, perhaps, may be that his piety was for the most part utilitarian, and that he used the external display of religiosity as a means of enhancing his legitimacy.

As Shah 'Abbās distanced himself over the years from his initial flirtation with extremism and adopted a politically more realistic policy of religious externalism, his patronization of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* increased accordingly. In 1003/1594-95, a large number of *fuqahā'* were invited to Qazvin and entertained there by the ruler. Shah 'Abbās paid special attention to Shaykh Bahā al-dīn 'Āmilī, better known simply as Shaykh Bahā'ī, who was to become the most emi-

nent of all the Twelver Shi'ite scholars during the reign of Shah 'Abbās. As Aubin has noted, there was a 'parallel development between the elimination of the characteristically Safavid element and the consolidation of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran.' [91] With the help of Shaykh Bahā'ī, Shah 'Abbās built up Isfahan — which he had made his capital in 1006/1597-98 — into a thriving metropolis and important centre of Twelver Shi'ite learning.[92] Another important point to note is that with the emergence of Isfahan as the focal point of Twelver learning, for the first time in history the majority of Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* in Iran consisted of indigenous scholars. The process initiated by Shaykh Karakī whereby many of the Persian clerics — the majority of whom were non-externalist — were assimilated into the body of Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* was more or less completed by the reign of Shah 'Abbās. Thus we find an increasing number of the descendants of the early cleric-scholars and non-externalists entrenched in the pursuit of purely externalist knowledge. The influence exerted by the immigrant Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* on the indigenous scholars was to a certain extent reciprocated, although not generally speaking to the extent of forfeiting an externalist for a non-externalist or internalist outlook. Whereas those indigenous scholars who had been steeped in non-externalist pursuits were easily able to find a niche as *fuqahā'*, there is no record in the sources of any immigrant Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* consciously re-orienting their outlooks along the lines of non-externalism or internalism: the assimilation of the incoming *fuqahā'* manifested itself primarily in their becoming 'gentrified', in the sense that they became part of the landed classes.[93]

Another by-product of this process of assimilation was the emergence of

a syncretist element in Twelver Shi'ite circles of learning. Shaykh Bahā'ī, for instance, was an authority on *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* who also had leaning towards the rational, non-externalist sciences. Whether or not he can be said to have combined the elements of internalism and externalism in the way they were intended to be combined and in the correct proportions is difficult to ascertain, although from a study of the titles of his works it would appear that externalism had the upper hand. His poetry, however, points the other way and demonstrates that a synthesis was possible, albeit extremely rare. Bahā'ī's contemporary and friend, Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī (d. 1041/1631-32), better known as Mīr Dāmād , also combined the rational and scriptural sciences in his output, leaning heavily towards the non-externalist sciences of philosophy and theosophy.[94] He is credited with having founded the so-called 'school of Isfahan', the school of gnostic philosophy or *'irfān* that was to be the principal — and final — bastion of internalism in the Safavid period.

Although syncretism was not strictly speaking a by-product of the religiously enlightened and relatively liberal atmosphere engendered by Shah 'Abbās, the fact that internalism and externalism were able to exist in relative peace most certainly was. Again this must be attributed to the character of the ruler himself, and to the absolute authority that was invested in him as Shah, and, therefore, as patron of the religious scholars in his midst — both internalist and externalist alike. Although, as we have seen, Shah 'Abbās withdrew his support from the organised Sufi orders and was ruthless in his extirpation of extremism, his patronage of individual non-externalists continued — often to the detriment of the external-

ists. Shaykh Jawād b. Sa'īd b. Jawād al-Kāẓimī, a student of Shaykh Bahā'ī and a prominent *faqīh* in his own right, held the office of *shaykh al-islām* in the town of Astarabad until a *contretemps* with some of the inhabitants led to their expelling him from the town. Shaykh Jawād appealed to Shah 'Abbās to solve the problem. The Shah, however, refused to help the *faqīh* and in fact went one step further by banishing him from the country. This apparently drastic course of action becomes easier to understand when one realises that Shah 'Abbās was a follower in spiritual matters of Sayyid Amīr Muḥammad Astarābādī, a Sufi adept and elder of the town, and the one who had been the most vociferous in calling for Shaykh Jawād's expulsion.[95]

Although Shah 'Abbās was ready to adopt such measures as were illustrated above in deference to individuals, as far as the 'religious' classes as a whole were concerned he kept a firm upper hand in all of his dealings with them. The way he managed his leading scholars is best exemplified by an anecdote cited by Sir John Malcolm in his **History of Persia**:

> It is related that when he (Shah 'Abbās) was one day riding with the celebrated Meer Mahomed Bauker Damad (Mīr Dāmād) on his right hand and the equally famed Shaikh Bahaudeen Aumilee (Shaykh Bahā'ī) on his left, the king desired to discover if there lurked any secret envy, or jealousy, in the breasts of these two learned priests. Turning to Meer Mahomed Bauker, whose horse was prancing and capering, he observed,"What a dull brute Shaikh Bahaudeen is riding! He cannot make his animal keep pace with us." "The wonder is, how the horse moves at all," said the Moolah,"when he considers what a load of learning and knowledge he has upon his back." Abbas, after some time, turned round to Shaikh Bahaudeen, and said to

> him,"Did you ever see such a prancing animal as that which Meer Mahomed Bauker rides? Surely that is not the style for a horse to go in who carried a grave Moolah." "Your Majesty will, I am assured," said the shaikh," forgive the horse, when you reflect on the just right he has to be proud of his rider." The monarch bent his head forward on his saddle, and returned thanks to the Almighty for the singular blessing He had bestowed upon his reign, of two wise and pious men, who, though living at a court, had minds untainted by envy and hatred.[96]

Apart from demonstrating the unrivalled authority of the ruler over his theologians and *fuqahā'*, the above anecdote shows that in the reign of Shah 'Abbās I the relative lack of antagonism between externalism and non-externalism was such that exponents of both aspects — if Shaykh Bahā'ī is taken here to be predominantly externalist — were able to co-exist in harmony and lend support, even, to each other on occasions such as the one mentioned.

Before concluding the chapter with the reigns of Shah 'Abbās I's immediate successors, Shah Ṣafī(1629-42) and Shah 'Abbās II (1642-66), under whom non-externalism was able to flourish, an important detour must be made into the realm of both externalism and non-externalism alike in order to gain a firmer grasp of the nature of both orientations and to realise why *rapprochement* between them occurred only rarely and how, at least up until the advent of Shah Sulaymān in 1077/1666, a relatively peaceful but distanced co-existence was the most that could be achieved between them.

3.8 The externalists: their milieu and teachings

For a review of the Twelver Shi'ite externalists and their academic output in the Safavid period it is useful to look at what might be considered the most comprehensive — although not necessarily the most detailed — of the biographical dictionaries which deal with the lives and works of Twelver Shi'ite scholars, the six-volume work entitled **Riyāḍ al- 'ulamā' wa ḥiyāḍ al-fuḍalā** (The Gardens of the Knowledgeable and the Sacred Domains of the Learned) by Shaykh 'Abdullāh Afandī al-Iṣfahānī. Less parochial than **Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn** [97] and **Amal al-āmil,**[98] both of which focus on scholars from two particular geographical areas, and more expansive than **Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'**[99] and **Rawḍat al-jannāt,** Afandī's work paints a vast portrait of Twelver Shi'ite scholarship against a canvas of history that stretches from the era of the founding fathers of Twelver Shi'ism — Shaykh Mufīd, Shaykh Ṭūṣī *et al* — to the momentous years preceding the Afghan conquest of Iran in the early 12th/18th century. Fortunately for us, the bulk of the work concerns itself with the Safavid scholars: an estimated 90 per cent of the biographies included are of scholars operating under the rule of one or other of the Safavid rulers. The work is clearly not an exhaustive one; indeed it does not purport to be so. Unheard of scholars studying and teaching in private in obscure corners of the realm do not, for obvious reasons, appear in these volumes, although the existence of such figures is inferred and used on occasions to illustrate anecdotes about the more prominent lights of the Safavid academic firmament. The fact that it is the obviously more prominent scholars who are listed by the author leaves one to imagine the extent to which scholars of academic orientations other

than those which feature most frequently in the work were operating throughout the length and breadth of the country. However, it was public prominence, proximity to royal circles, and kingly patronage that would undoubtedly determine which trend would be set, all of this fuelled undoubtedly by the bias of the rulers towards one orientation rather than another. Up until and including the reign of Shah 'Abbās I, externalism had been allowed to flourish unhampered. Non-externalism, certain expressions of which, as we have seen, were suppressed by the state, continued to prosper, albeit with numerous setbacks and difficulties for its proponents. It would continue to play an important role in the lives of the Iranian people during the reigns of both Shah Ṣafī and Shah 'Abbās II, most saliently via the gnostic philosophy of the 'School of Isfahan', more about which we shall read later. The Safavid era cannot, then, be seen as a backdrop against which Sufi and *faqīh* fought for prominence.[100] **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** should not be construed as being biased towards externalism. Afandī, despite being an externalist himself, is relatively — and refreshingly — fair in his assessment of his subjects, and must be considered as having portrayed an historical fact, namely that in Safavid Iran it was the externalist who enjoyed greater prominence and recognition.

Statistically speaking, Afandī's figures are staggering: of approximately 2412 scholars mentioned, 2345 are wholly or predominantly externalist in outlook. Afandī uses the terms *'ālim* (scholar; lit: 'one who knows'), *faqīh* (jurisprudent), and *fāḍil* (scholar; one who has attained excellence, or *faḍl*, in learning) to denote the externalists; he often uses all three terms simultaneously to describe the same individual. The corruption which obtained in the words *'ālim* and *faqīh* (described

in Chapter I) had by this time become engraved upon the psyche of all but the most discerning of scholars, and thus Afandī's use of the three terms together does not mean that he was aware of their semantic differences or that he was using them in their correct, unadulterated form. For the vast majority of scholars in Afandī's time, the words *faqīh, 'ālim* and *fāḍil* could mean only one thing: a person who had acquired a certain recognised proficiency in the assimilation and promulgation of the scriptural sciences. This is borne out, as we shall see shortly, by the individual biographies, which vary in length from as little as one line to as much as over 30 pages.

The 67 individuals who are predominantly non-externalist in outlook are characterized for the most part by the epithets *filsūf* (philosopher), *ḥakīm* (theosopher) or Sufi. Occasionally the words *faqīh* and *ḥakīm* appear together to describe the same person, denoting the fact that the scholar in question had been able to combine both externalist and non-externalist aspects in his writings. The true syncretist remains, however, a rare and exotic species as far as the Safavid scholarly realm is concerned. Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād, whom I have already mentioned, both combined the externalist and non-externalist aspects of Islam in their teachings, although in Shaykh Bahā'ī's case the externalist element far outweighed the non-externalist one, whereas Mīr Dāmād struck a more correct balance and thus stands as one of the few genuine syncretists of the Safavid era. Most of the 67 non-externalists mentioned in **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** do not take a syncretistic approach, however, and preponderate heavily towards the non-externalist sciences, some of them having no knowledge of *fiqh* or of the Arabic language whatsoever.

The use of the term non-externalist here is intended to indicate that one cannot be sure how many of these scholars who are described as philosophers, theosophers or Sufis were actually internalists in the pure sense of the word — despite the fact that philosophy, theosophy and Sufism are generally conducive to, but not the absolute prerequisites of, an internalist outlook *per se.* And to re-iterate earlier comments it must be stressed that the list of non-externalists is not an exhaustive one. It is clear that non-externalism had popular appeal throughout the Safavid era and did not begin to truly wane until the appearance of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. The **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'**, therefore, in showing a preponderance of externalists may not reflect the true grass-roots orientation of the Iranian populace during the Safavid era, but it does show the extent to which Twelver Shi'ite externalism supplanted its rivals in the academic sphere, the very place where it mattered and in which decisions as to what the future religious orientation of the people should be were taken.

As his appellation suggests, the externalist focuses his scholarly attention most fundamentally on *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, the former covering the dictates of the *sharī'a*, and the latter concerning the transmission and promulgation of the Prophetic traditions, the body of which acts as a vehicle for the *sunna.* For Twelver Shi'ites, as has already been noted, the *ḥadīth* also includes the sayings of the Imams; in fact, the sayings of the Prophet are held valid only if an Imam or trusted companion of an Imam appears in the chain of transmission. When talking in terms of Twelver Shi'ite externalism one must remember that the Twelver Shi'ite perception of the scriptural sciences is an 'imamocentric' one; the differ-

ence in matters of rite and ritual between the four Sunnite and the Twelver schools may indeed be negligible, but it is the spirit behind this difference, this 'imamo-centrism', which is of importance. The *imāma* being all important in Twelver Shi'ism, it is no surprise to find that the Twelver traditions focus as much on personalities — the Imams — as they do on legal and ritual detail. Thus the scope for work in the field of *ḥadīth* would appear to be much greater for the Twelver Shi'ites than for the Sunnites; not only is it the body of narrations concerning legal practices that they have to transmit but also the body of traditions that deals with the issues specifically related to the *imāma*, i.e. the concept of the Imamate itself; the sociopolitical and historical roles of the Imams; martyrdom; Mahdism; dissimulation etc. Any sect which is as determined as Twelver Shi'ism to insist on the unforgoable patronage of specific divinely appointed men (i.e. the Imams) for the preservation of the faith and the redemption of the individual inevitably promotes the development of a vast literature given over to the story of these men. One of the most important channels through which the saga of these men is told is the corpus of Twelver traditions encapsulated in the 'Four Books' (*al-kutub al-arba'a*) mentioned earlier but also in numerous other compilations spanning many centuries. Twelver Shi'ite traditions can thus be divided into two basic categories: those which deal with the principles of Twelver Shi'ism, and those which focus on its personalities.

The central element of the principles of Twelver Shi'ism consists of the fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-īmān*) of which there are five: the unity of God (*tawḥīd*); messengerhood (*nabuwwa*); the Resurrection (*ma'ād*); justice (*'adāla*);

and the Imamate (*imāma*). The first three of these are held in common with the Sunnites. As in the Sunnite corpus of traditions, a considerable number of Twelver traditions deals with these fundamentals of belief;[101] far greater attention, however, is paid to the question of *imāma*, which, although it ranks second in the Twelver Shi'ite hierarchy of fundamentals, would appear to outstrip all others in terms of the number of traditions pertaining to it. Consequently, the number of traditions in the Twelver Shi'ite collections which deals with personalities, i.e. the Imams, is far greater than the number of traditions in the Sunnite collections which describe the life, behaviour and everyday practices of Islam's pivotal personality, Muḥammad himself.

What should in reality be the peripheral element of the principles of Twelver Shi'ism, but which is fact elevated by the externalists to a position of kudos far beyond its true status, is the body of rites and rituals known as the *furū'* or 'secondary principles' of Islam, namely the rules which govern all of the external and practical aspects of the faith such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage etc. These secondary principles are so extensive and comprehensive that it seems as though every facet of day-to-day human life is covered by them.

As was noted in Chapter I, the difference in jurisprudential practice between the Sunnites and Twelver Shi'ites is often minimal; indeed, in many instances there is more discrepancy between the four Sunnite schools of jurisprudence than there is between the Sunnite schools as a whole and the Twelver Shi'ite school, more commonly known as the *madhhab al-ja'farī*, after its founder, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The

most salient common point between Sunnism and Twelver Shi'ism is that their scholars have throughout history paid an inordinate amount of attention to the study of secondary principles and to the transmission of them to succeeding generations of scholars via the twin sciences of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. In this sense, externalism — and its predominance over non-externalism and internalism — is by no means an exclusively Twelver Shi'ite phenomenon. But for historical reasons outlined earlier, the cultivation of the scriptural sciences enjoyed greater momentum in the Twelver Shi'ite world of learning.

The Twelver Shi'ite predilection for the scriptural sciences — the cornerstone of externalism — can be seen in the scholarly output of the Twelver Shi'ite scholars in the Safavid period. As Afandī shows, just as the number of externalists heavily outweighs that of the non-externalists, so too does the *fiqh/ḥadīth* element preponderate over the non-scriptural one in the academic output of the Safavid Twelver scholars.

The exposition of matters of ritual and sacred law is the focal point of externalist teaching; thus in the Safavid period as a whole, and particularly after the transference of the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, a plethora of works on the secondary principles emerged. The following subjects are the most conspicuous among Afandī's list of Twelver jurisprudential works: the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*); fasting (*ṣawm*); *khums* and *zakāt*; pilgrimage (*ḥajj* and *zīyāra*); the regulations governing Friday prayers; ritual purity and impurity (*ṭahāra* and *najāsa*); divorce (*ṭalāq*); the rules concerning the correct way of reciting the Quran (*qarā'a*); su-

perogatory prayers (*du'ā*); acts of worship to be carried out at various times of the day (*a'māl al-yawmiyya*); and foster-relationships (*riḍā'*). These matters of rite and ritual, passed down to the faithful from the Prophet and/or the Imams, were presented in the form of general *ḥadīth* collections or in short treatises devoted to one particular topic. Very often a scholar would simply collect together all of the traditions he had heard from his various teachers or gleaned from various sources concerning one subject in particular — ritual prayer for instance — and then distribute it as a treatise under his own name, often without adding any comment on or explanation of the narrative text. These traditions would then be transmitted to the disciples of that scholar, who would then be able to quote, use and transmit them upon his authority. Such collations for the most part added nothing new to the traditions in question and should be seen purely as a vehicle for the preservation of the material produced in the formative years of Twelver *ḥadīth* literature, the era of the first 'three Muḥammads' and the four canonical books of Twelver traditions. Evidence points to the conclusion that the entire corpus of Twelver Shi'ite traditions had been produced by the beginning of the 'Greater Occultation', and that all traditions known today only from later works — such as those which appeared in the Safavid period — are more or less faithful reproductions, with some notable exceptions, of ancient material going back to the era of the Imams themsleves. The importance of the *ḥadīth* for the Twelver Shi'ites — especially during those periods when they existed as a minority — as a vehicle through which they articulated their attitude towards their environment, formulated their customs and beliefs, and asserted themselves as a clearly definable

entity, was manifest in the the fact that some scholars spent the best part of their lives on the compilation of a volume or volumes of traditions, often travelling far and wide and risking life and limb to collect narrations from other scholars and from written sources.[102]

Externalism, with its emphasis on the narrative (*naqlī*) rather than the rational (*'aqlī*) sciences, lends itself more to repetition than to innovation. Thus in **Riyāḍ al-'ulama** one comes across numerous works of glossography (*ta'līq* or *ḥāshiya*) and commentary (*sharḥ*), most of which centres on the pioneering works of the founding fathers of Twelver Shi'ite *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. Afandī lists the titles of over 200 glosses or *ḥawāshī* ; the **al-Lum'at al-Dimashqiyya** of Shahīd al-Awwal alone had a dozen commentaries written on it.[103] Afandī lists the tiles of almost 300 *sharḥ* or commentaries, and it is not unusual to find glosses on commentaries, or commentaries on commentaries.[104] For the most part, the externalist commentary or gloss consists of nothing more than interlinear or marginal notes, confined usually to explanations of abstruse passages or difficult words in the text. Only in the commentaries written by non-externalists do we find material that adds to the original and stands as innovative, pioneering work in its own right: Lāhījī's commentary on Shabistarī's **Gulshan-i rāz** is a perfect example in this context.[105]

However, this is not to say that the Twelver Shi'ite externalists of the Safavid period did not have their innovators: we have already noted the steps taken by Shaykh Karakī to make the Twelver *faqīh/mujtahid* the general representative

of the Hidden Imam. The question of *ijtihād* itself was a thorny one, and one which was the focal point of much controversy throughout the Safavid period, eventually giving rise to the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī rift which shall be discussed shortly. Suffice it here to say that even by the end of the Safavid period, the use of *ijtihād*, or independent reasoning, to arrive at jurisprudential rulings on unprecedented questions of rite and ritual was by no means settled. Those who did use *ijtihād*, however, used it to great effect — as Karakī's rulings and the public reaction to them attest — and in the treatises written by the *mujtahidūn* one gets a glimpse of the precise and orderly thinking of the jurisprudential mind, with its love of investigation into the minutest of legal minutiae and its overt penchant for hair-splitting. The power of expression utilized in some of these treatises is quite striking and one wonders what effect these scholars would have had on an attentive audience had they focused their academic talents on the fundamentals of *īmān* rather than — or, at least, as well as — the secondary principles of Islam. Shaykh 'Alī al-Farāhānī's treatise on the prohibition (*ḥurma*) of tobacco, written in 1048/1638-39 and quoted in full in **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'**, is a prime example of the kind of work that was issuing forth from the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* and *mujtahidūn* in Safavid Iran; it is also but one of countless such treatises that flooded through the *madrasas* and from the mosque pulpits in the form of sermons throughout the period.[106]

Among the works of the Twelver externalists, those concerned with the virtues and prerogatives of the Imams occupy a special position, and many treatises and *ḥadīth* collections were compiled throughout the era. The earliest known traditions on the doctrine of *imāma* appear in Kulaynī's **al-Kāfī** , Kulaynī hav-

ing taken them from earlier works such as **Baṣā'ir al-darajāt** by Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Qummī. These traditions deal with subjects such as the necessity of the Imam, belief in the Imam as a prerequisite of *īmān*, knowledge of the Imam (*ma'rifat al-imām*), and so on. These and similar traditions were preserved in new collections made by the Safavid *fuqahā'* which were designed to enhance the status of the Imams in the eyes of the newly converted populace even further. The open proclamation of the virtues of the Imams, known as *manqabat-khwānī*, is as old a phenomenon as Twelver Shi'ism itself, but its expression in the form of collections of traditions that focused solely on the personality, virtues, miracles and sufferings of the Imams moved up several gears in the Safavid period, the first such written collections being spread through early Safavid Iran by the father of Shaykh Bahā'ī and by the great-grandfather of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, Shaykh Kamāl al-dīn Darwīsh.[107] In addition to the traditions in which the position of the Imam is central, there are numerous traditions which stress the rights of each individual Imam by referring to words and actions of the Prophet which are held to constitute an explicit designation of that Imam. The earliest collections often went under the titles of *khaṣā'iṣ, manāqib* or *faḍā'il* of 'Alī, as they extolled the virtues and the right to rule of the first Shi'ite Imam. By the latter part of the Safavid period the imamocentric nature of Twelver Shi'ite externalism was such that most of the twelve Imams, plus the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭima, had individual collections of traditions compiled about them. Ḥusayn b.'Alī, the third Shi'ite Imam who was slaughtered at Karbala, provided the inspiration for a whole genre of *ḥadīth* literature known as *maqtal-niwīsī*: Afandī cites various works of this nature with the

title **Maqtal al-Ḥusayn.**[108] These were similar in content to the *rawḍa* literature, the first and most salient example of which was **Rawḍat al-shuhadā** by Ḥusayn Wā'iẓ al-Kāshifī, who was neither Twelver Shi'ite nor, strictly speaking, an externalist, but rather a Hanafite member of the Naqshbandiyya.

These traditions, and others like them, were also used in theoretical works on the *imāma*, works which were designed to prove the necessity of the *imāma* through both narrative and rational proofs. Many of those scholars listed by Afandī as *fuqahā'* are also credited with works of *kalām*, or theology. Now *kalām* is traditionally a rational or *'aqlī* science, concerned with proving through deductive reasoning the existence of God and His names, attributes and acts etc., but although it is a fact that the majority of externalists would most likely have a basic grounding in *kalām*, this should not be construed as pointing to a rational, non-externalist or internalist bent on their part, although in certain instances this may have been the case. The study and teaching of *kalām* does not necessarily indicate that a scholar is biased towards non-externalism. In the case of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* the use of the term *kalām* to describe some of their works is doubly ambiguous, for the very reason that it has often been applied to treatises which aim to prove not the existence of God, which is the usual function of *kalām*, but the necessity of the *imāma* or the validity of the claims of the Imams. One of the earliest examples of a Twelver Shi'ite work which uses *kalām* in this way is Ibn Bābūya's **al-I'tiqādāt al-imāmiyya** , the prototype for Safavid works such as **Iṯẖbāt al-imāma,**[109] *Iṯẖbat-i wujūd-i ṣāḥib al-zamān,*[110] or any of the twenty or so works of *kalām* that Afandī mentions with the simple title **al-Imāma.**[111] A con-

comitant of the use of *kalām* to prove the necessity of the *imāma* and the validity of the claims of the Imams is the use of the term *ma'rifa* to denote knowledge not about God, as in the usual usage of the term, but about the Imam. Works were given over to this 'knowledge', without which one's belief as a Muslim was deemed incomplete.[112]

The Twelver *fuqahā'* also produced a considerable amount of Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), although there was not nearly as much of this as there was of straightforward *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* material. Exegesis made by the Twelver externalists of the Safavid period is similar in style and format to that of the early Shi'ite works of *tafsīr*, in which the stress is laid mainly on traditions narrated from the Imams which describe the reasons for the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of a particular verse. Early works such as the anonymously penned **Tafsīr al-'Askarī** , attributed to the eleventh Shi'ite Imam, and the **Tafsīr al-Qummī**, serve as prototypes for the kind of exegeses produced by the Safavid externalists. Often fiercely anti-Sunnite in spirit, these works pay very little attention to linguistic problems and tend to ignore many difficult passages entirely. Legal, linguistic and doctrinal problems do receive attention in later works, yet the essence of these expositions is still heavily imamocentric: many works of Quranic exegesis were compiled with the sole aim of proving that the Imams, their virtues, rights and sufferings are all described and foretold in the Quran. A treatise entitled **Āyāt al-wilāya** by the Safavid *faqīh* and exegete Abū al-Qāsim Sharīfī, also known as Mīrzā Bābā Shīrāzī, deals with 300 Quranic verses purported to have been revealed concerning the 'Fourteen Immaculate Ones' (*chahārdah ma'ṣūm*).[113] Sayyid Sharaf al-dīn 'Alī

Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī al-Najafī, a student of Shaykh Karakī, wrote an exegesis on the same lines but under the title of **Ta'wīl**, i.e the practice of extracting the hidden meanings that lie beneath the surface of the Quranic verses.[114]

By focusing on the secondary principles, the very things which set them apart from their Sunnite co-religionists, and, more importantly, on the question of *imāma*, the Twelver Shi'ite works of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* are implicitly anti-Sunnite, this in spite of the fact that the scholars of both groups were in many periods of history able to co-exist relatively peacefully, with a *modus vivendi* based on their mutual agreement to differ. Although prior to the advent of the Safavids there were occasions on which sectarian hostility would transcend the level of mere polemics, it was not until the establishment of the Safavid dynasty that the anti-Sunnite posturing of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* took on more vehement and often hysterically hostile tones. The wave of sectarian killings that hit Iran during the early years of Safavid rule has already been noted, as have the formation of the *Tabarrā'iyyūn*, the corps of Twelver zealots who enforced the ritual cursing of the first three Caliphs, and the staunchly anti-Sunnite writings of Shaykh Karakī.

Whether fuelled by their newly found freedom of expression or by the intermittent conflicts with the Sunnite Ottoman state during the formative years of the Safavid era,[115] the Twelver Shi'ite externalists kept up a constant barrage of anti-Sunnite polemics, the most damning of which, as we have already seen in Karakī's writings, deems the Sunnites to be infidels (*kuffār*) and ritually unclean (*najis*).[116] Prayer manuals such as **Ḏẖakhr al-'ālamīn**, compiled by Muḥammad

Mahdī al-Qazwīnī(d. 1129/1716-17) and dedicated to Shah Sultan Ḥusayn (1694-1722) includes curses upon the first three Caliphs and all who follow them.[117] Afandī cites several cases in which the extremism of the Twelver Shi'ite externalists' anti-Sunnism led to disaster. One Twelver *faqīh*, for example, saw fit to show his opposition to Sunnism by defecating in the place where the Hanafites prayed in Mecca and was killed as a result.[118] This bizarre behaviour on the part of the *faqīh* was not an isolated case: a certain Shaykh 'Alī al-'Āmilī al-Shāmī defecated on the grave of Mu'āwiya for a whole year and preached on the spiritual benefits of this practice to the people.[119]

The Twelver Shi'ite externalist polemics directed against non-externalist scholars was in many cases no less scabrous than their fulminations against the Sunnites. The graves of well-known Sufi adepts such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī were defiled and numerous refutations of Sufism were written.[120] Anti-Sufi treatises were by no means monopolized by the externalists: Mullā Ṣadrā, a non-externalist *par excellence*, also wrote such a treatise, entitled **Kasr al-aṣnām al-jāhiliyya (Breaking the Idols of Ignorance)**. However, Ṣadrā's objection was not to Sufism *per se* but to the antinomian tendencies of the *mutaṣawwifūn*, or pseudo-Sufis. The externalists evidently saw all Sufis as antinomian and thus did not specify whom they were attacking in their works, which usually carried the prosaic title **al-Radd 'ala al-ṣūfiyya (Refutation of Sufism)**.[121] An idea of the general attitude held by the externalists to the non-externalists can be gained by reading Afandī's comments. Describing Muḥammad Qawām al-dīn Iṣfahānī, a philosopher and student of the renowned Mawlā Rajab

'Alī Tabrīzī, Afandī says that 'he had corrupt ideas (*'aqā'id fāsida*), lived as a recluse, and lacked any religious (*dīnī*) or Divine (*ilāhī*) knowledge.' [122] Furthermore he did not know Arabic and no-one attended his funeral. Afandī constantly denigrates the non-externalists for their lack of Arabic. His remarks also reveal once again how the scriptural sciences had come to be equated with 'religious knowledge', a term that by its very use of the word *dīnī* automatically equates all other branches of learning as being at the very least ideologically suspect, and at the most plain heretical. Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī, the aforementioned teacher of Iṣfahānī and someone who was visited personally by Shah 'Abbās II, is also derided by Afandī for his lack of Arabic and for the fact that he was ignorant of the 'religious' sciences.[123] Ḥasan al-Daylamānī al-Jīlānī, who was versed in *ḥikma* and taught in the 'Abbāsī mosque in Isfahan, is dismissed by Afandī as being mentally unbalanced; Afandī adds, somewhat cryptically, that 'Jīlānī was loved by other *ḥakīms* and Sufis.' [124] Mullā Ṣadrā receives an inordinate amount of externalist vitriol. Despite his fame and academic stature, Ṣadrā appears to warrant no more than a few lines of comment in Tunukābunī's **Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'**, and even then the author contrives to dismiss him by inferring sexual ambiguity on Ṣadrā's part.[125] Afandī, who Dānishpaẕhūh claims is among the least zealous of the Safavid *fuqahā'*, is also reproachful of Ṣadrā, albeit not so blatantly. Commenting upon Ṣadrā's son, Ibrāhīm, a *faqīh*, Afandīsays that he is 'living proof of the Quranic verse,"He brings life out of death" ', thus equating the externalism of Ṣadrā's son with life and the non-externalism of Ṣadrā himself with death.[126]

However united a whole the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* may have been as far

as their pursuit of externalism and the vilification of their non-externalist rivals are concerned, on the main issues of the day they were as internally divided as any interest group could have been. Apart from the obvious differences of opinion that arose as a matter of course between the *fuqahā'* on minor points of sacred law and ritual practice, two highly controversial matters fractured the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* into various different and often overlapping ideological factions. These matters concerned the Friday congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum'a*), and the dual practices of *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*. The question of whether or not the Friday congregational prayer should be performed in the absence of the Imam was one that formed the basis of much debate throughout the Safavid period, with many treatises being written either for or against its permissibility. The issue was related directly to the question of the Twelver attitude towards the state; those *fuqahā'* who deemed Friday prayer permissible in the absence of the Imam were in favour of taking a more positive stand towards the state and political life in general, while those who deemed the Friday prayer illegal during the occultation preferred not to have dealings with the state, which, in the absence of the Imam, they believed to be inherently unjust. More about the political attitudes of the Twelver *fuqahā'* will be said in Chapter V in the section on *intiẓār*; suffice it here to say that the question of involvement in, or withdrawal from, matters of state as reflected in the Friday prayer controversy was one which occupied the attention of many scholars, and divided them, throughout the period.

The question of whether *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* were permissible or not was one that was posed during the Uṣūlī-Akhbārī debate, a controversy that raged through-

out the second half of the Safavid era and which was to be of great importance for the standing of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* in post-Safavid Iran and up until the present day. Akhbārism was a school of thought revived early in the 11th/17th century by Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d.1033/1623-24).[127] In his work entitled **Fawā'id al-madaniyya** , Astarābādī attacks the rational, analytical approach to jurisprudence favoured by early Twelver *fuqahā'* such as Ṭūṣī, Mufīd and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, and by their Safavid counterparts, who came to be known, in contrast,as the Uṣūliyyūn. The main difference between the two groups concerned the validity or invalidity of reason in connection with matters of law, with the Akhbāriyyūn trying to revive what they saw as proper traditionalism by relying exclusively on the sayings of the Imams. For instance, Muqaddas Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585), an Akhbārī and avowed abstainer from all matters of state and politics, never hesitated to reject the opinion of all previous Shi'ite jurists wherever they excluded traditions on the basis of a rational argument.[128] A corollary of this was the rejection by the Akhbāriyyūn of *ijtihād* and *taqlīd.* According to the Akhbāriyyūn, every individual believer must follow the *akhbār* (traditions) of the Imams, for whose proper understanding no more than a knowledge of Arabic and the specific terminology of the Imams is needed; if a conflict between contradictory traditions cannot be resolved, abstention from a ruling is necessary.[129] Consequently, recourse to a *mujtahid* is prohibited, since obedience is due to God, Muḥammad, the Imams and no-one else, the rules emanating from the sacred law being directly obtainable from the traditions themselves.[130] Akhbārism was thus a direct threat to the position of the Twelver Shi'ite *mujtahid* as envisaged by Shaykh Karakī and aspired to

by countless *fuqahā'* from the beginning of the Safavid period. The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī controversy occupied the time and energy of many Twelver externalists — and also some non-externalists — but again, as in the case of the debate on the Friday congregational prayer, scholarly attention was focused on a secondary rather than a fundamental issue.

Although the questions mentioned above split the externalists into often hostile factions, adding further divisions to the basic externalist/non-externalist rift, the borders between these factions were often blurred, with much overlapping of interests and loyalties. The 'pigeonhole disease', so named by Clifford Geertz, is one that students of Safavid history have found almost impossible to escape. Said Arjomand, for example, claims that Akhbārism bore the imprint of the outlook of what he calls the 'clerical estate', which 'tended to prefer philosophy and hermeneutics and devotional mysticism.' [131] However, renowned Akhbārī scholars such as Mawlā Muḥammad Shafī' al-Jīlānī, Shaykh Khalīl al-Qazwīnī, Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, and Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī all opposed the pursuit of theosophy and Sufism, Qummī most vehemently so.[132] In the case of Friday prayer, Qummī and Shaykh Khalīl al-Qazwīnī could not be reconciled by their common adherence to Akhbārism, with the former declaring the Friday prayer a religious necessity (*wājib*) and the latter deeming it unlawful (*ḥarām*).[133] Arjomand tries to tie up the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī division with the 'clerical estate - dogmatic party' dichotomy, but is clearly unable to do so. However hard one tries to impose rigid clasifications on the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era one can still not escape the fact that what they were about was strictly peripheral to the question

of belief, self-knowledge and knowledge of the Divine, and that their controversies, polemics and endless hair-splitting over sacred law and legal minutiae were but a smokescreen to hide what can only be interpreted as their indifference to the fundamental message of the Islamic revelation.

3.9 In search of Twelver Shi'ite internalism

It has been demonstrated in the previous pages that the pursuit of non-scriptural, so-called rational sciences such as *falsafa* and *ḥikma* have traditionally been disfavoured by the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*, who in this respect display attitudes similar to those of their Sunnite counterparts. However, the emphasis on externalism — and, obviously, on their own particular brand of externalism — seems to have had considerably more impetus among the Twelver Shi'ite scholars than among the Sunnites. As noted previously, prior to the Safavid regime there were no Sufi groups claiming to adhere to orthodox Twelver Shi'ism; all Sufi adepts belonged to one of the Sunnite schools of jurisprudence, and even those groups which professed Shi'ism at the outset of the Safavid era must remain suspect as far as the sincerity of their alleged *volte-face* is concerned. Furthermore, the toleration by Sunnite *fuqahā'* of non-externalist approaches to the Islamic revelation such as philosophy, theosophy and Sufism would appear to have always been greater than that shown by their Twelver Shi'ite counterparts. The attitude of Ibn Taymiyya, one of Sunnism's most vociferous anti-Sufi polemicists, towards Sufi figures such as Junayd and Bāyazīd is a good example in this respect.[134] The Twelver Shi'ite externalist attitude to disciplines outside the orbit of *fiqh* and

ḥadīth has already been noted; Afandī sums it up when, while commenting on the fact that a certain scholar has been described as both a *ḥakīm* and a *faqīh*, he says that to combine *ḥikma* and *fiqh* 'is to combine two diametrically opposed things' (*jam' bayn al-aḍdād*) and is thus impossible.[135]

Noted also is the tendency of the *fuqahā'* to equate only *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* with 'religious' knowledge, all other approaches being in their eyes ideologically suspect. Here one point must be clarified. The Muslim *fuqahā'* do not ignore the fundamentals of *īmān* ; it is simply that their orientation is towards the propagation of the externals of religion, the secondary principles (*furū' al-dīn*). The difference between externalism and internalism is thus one of emphasis. Indeed, any *faqīh* of note would be expected to have studied both the scriptural and the rational sciences; the fact that he became a *faqīh* would be a reflection of his own personal preference for the scriptural sciences, which are the tools of externalism, over the rational disciplines. As the sources show, scholars would study the scriptural sciences under one teacher or series of teachers, and the rational sciences under another teacher or series of teachers. The rational sciences, although in theory more conducive to the pursuit of internalism than the scriptural sciences, were practically ineffective however as a means of leading the student towards self- or God- knowledge, since disciplines such as *kalām* had long since been channelled towards knowledge about the Imams (*ma'rifat al-a'imma*) and proof of their *imāma*. Yet as Afandī shows, those scholars with an internalist bent are nearly always credited with the title *ḥakīm*, or theosopher, and thus the possibility that one engaged in the pursuit of the intellectual sciences would incline to the heavily

non-externalistic interests such as Sufim or gnosis (*'irfān*) was one which made the *fuqahā'* wary. Again this must not be construed as implying that the *fuqahā'* were against anyone knowing God *per se*. According to the author of **Surūr al-'ārifīn**,

> The hide-bound scholars (*qishriyyūn*) are not scared that people may know God, as long as it is in the limited sense that is allowed by their frame of reference. What they (the *fuqahā'*) are scared of is that the enquirer (*ṭālib*) may come to know God as God intends him to, in which case he (the enquirer) will realise that the claims of the hide-bound scholars to true knowledge are based upon nothing (*bar bād-i hawā ast* , lit. are upon air, i.e. baseless).[136]

Faced, then, with what would appear to be the immiscibility of Twelver Shi'ite externalism and internalism, how does one interpret the theories of those such as Henry Corbin, who calls Twelver Shi'ism 'the sanctuary of Islamic esoterism' ?[137] Or Hamid Algar, who talks of conciliation between Sunnism and Shi'ism at 'the level of the esoteric' ?[138] Or Hamid Enayat, who associates *bāṭin, ta'wīl* and *ḥaqīqa* with the teachings of Twelver Shi'ism, and *ẓāhir, tafsīr* and *sharī'a* with the teachings of Sunnism ?[139] Enayat's question, in which he attributes the externalist elements, i.e. *ẓāhir, tafsīr* and *sharī'a* of these dual notions to the Sunnites and the internalist components, i.e. *bāṭin, tafsīr* and *sharī'a*, to the Twelver Shi'ites, is totally at odds not only with the already mentioned facts concerning Sufism and Sunnism, or with the overwhelming preponderance of *fuqahā'* over *ḥukamā* or Sufis in **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'**, but also, as has been noted, with how the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* see themselves, i.e. as the true guardians of religious and divine

knowledge. If in his usage of the terms *bāṭin* and *ta'wīl* Enayat is referring to the Twelver Shi'ite practice of finding hidden references to the Imams in the verses of the Quran, then the contention that Twelver Shi'ism is characterized in its interpretation of the Quran by a certain esotericism is to a certain extent correct. However, the search for inner, hidden meanings through an allegorical interpretation of Quranic verses by the Twelver *fuqahā'* should not be confused with the usual notion of *ta'wīl* and *bāṭin* held by the orthodox Sufis and other non-externalists, an example of which, from the pen of Mullā Ṣadrā, was provided earlier.[140] The imamocentric interpretation of the Quran, known technically as *jary*,[141] cannot be seen as internalistically oriented, for the simple reason that the object sought is not knowledge (*ma'rifa*) about God but about the Imam.

Yet one still has to account for those individuals who have been identified as Twelver Shi'ites — and who, more importantly, have identified themselves as such [142] — but whose religious orientation and academic markings differ profoundly from those of the externalist majority. To what extent can we call them Twelver Shi'ite internalists? A brief description of the life and works of two of them, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr, may help to answer this question. Āmulī, incidentally, is the figure upon whom Corbin has mainly based his assertion that Twelver Shi'ism is the cradle of Islamic esotericism.[143]

In his most famous work, **Jāmi' al-asrār**, Ḥaydar b. 'Alī b. Ḥaydar b. 'Alī al-Āmulī (b. 720/1320; still alive in 787/1385-86), better known simply as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, states that he had at one time been a fanatical Shi'ite *faqīh*,

but had then become a Sufi, giving up fanaticism in favour of tolerance.[144] Āmulī states that his aim was to reconcile the *sharī'a* with the *ḥaqīqa*, or Truth, and to this end he took for his mentors the Imams of the house of 'Alī, and the 'people of unity' (*ahl al-tawḥīd*) from among the Sufis, employing what he found of Shi'ite sayings in favour of Sufism and vice versa.[145] In order to establish the closest possible contact between the two groups he used Ibn Maytham's commentary on the **Nahj al-balāgha**, Ibn al-Muṭahhar's **Minhaj al-maqāl** and Shaykh Ṭūṣī's **Tajrīd**. These, if not openly in favour of Sufism, do not attack it. He also made extensive use of the works of Ghazālī and Ibn al-'Arabī. In Āmulī's view, 'from the beginning of time to eternity, Divine knowledge and Godly truths have been attributed to 'Alī alone';[146] in his schema, all Twelve Imams were connected to the Sufi adepts of their own times. For Āmulī, the Imam and the Sufi *quṭb* or 'pole' are one and the same.[147] He also expresses the opinion that there are two kinds of Shi'ism: one which is dependent or based on externals (*ẓāhir*) and whose sciences are the *sharī'a* and Islam; and another, which is based upon the internal or hidden (*bāṭin*) and whose sciences are *al-ṭarīqa* (the Path), *al-ḥaqīqa* (the Truth), and *al-īqān* (the Certainty).[148] In Āmulī's opinion, the final aim of knowledge must be *ḥikma*, and the ultimate realisation that nothing really exists but God.[149] Aiming to bring together the diverse elements within Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism, he made a conscious attempt to establish a new way, with *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyya* as the goal, conveyed through Sufism with a Twelver Shi'ite flavour. He himself, however, realized that he was unable to reconcile Sufi doctrines such as those concerning the *quṭb* with Twelver beliefs, and readily admitted defeat.[150]

Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 901/1495-96) was born in Bahrein but spent most of his life travelling around Iraq and Khurasan. He was a follower of Ḥaydar Āmulī, whom he called the *quṭb al-aqṭāb* or 'Pole of Poles'. Like his spiritual master, Ibn Jumhūr also attempted the integration of Sufism and Shi'ism; however he went much further than Āmulī in that he explicitly advocated the formation of 'one sect with one belief.' [151] Whereas Āmulī centred on the supposed identicality of Sufism and Shi'ism, Ibn Jumhūr was much more eclectic in his approach, drawing freely upon sources such as Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī, Manṣūr Ḥallāj, 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī, Ibn al-'Arabī, Plato, Aristotle, Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī, Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūṣī, Ibn Sīnā and Fārābī.[152] He also sought to make use of Ash'arite theology, claiming that the whole essence of *tawḥīd* is to prove the existence of one Creator.[153]

In his most famous work, **al-Mujlī** , an encyclopaedic treatise that deals with the Divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and the divine acts (*af'āl*), Ibn Jumhūr ignores almost all of the traditional works of the Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy. Shaykh Mufīd, for example, is mentioned only once — an attitude deplorable to the externalists. Ibn Jumhūr's **Ghawālī al-li'ālī** was attacked on the grounds that it included traditions from Sunnite sources, and as a consequence Ibn Jumhūr was declared unreliable.[154] He was also branded a Sufi; no standard Shi'ite *faqīh* is mentioned as having been his student, although he himself claimed to have many. Only in the Ni'matullāhī work **Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq** is he mentioned as 'one of the great *fuqahā'* and investigators, who supported and improved the way of the Sufi shaykhs and laid the foundations of the religious doctrines.' [155] It is doubtful that the author of **Ṭarā'iq** is using the term *faqīh* in the sense understood today, however. Yet

Ibn Jumhūr's association with Twelver Shi'ism is clear, for like Ḥaydar Āmulī he believed that 'Alī was a saint (*walī*) and the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), and that the Twelve Imams formed a chain of successive Sufi shaykhs.[156]

In what sense can Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr be called Twelver Shi'ites? Are the externalism of the likes of Shaykh Karakī and the internalism of the likes of Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr simply two sides of the same Twelver Shi'ite coin, just as the externalism of Ibn Taymiyya and the internalism of Ghazālī are two sides of the same coin in Sunnism? Or are we, when discussing the respective approaches of, say, Shaykh Karakī and Ibn Jumhūr, discussing two almost totally different and, in many respects, mutually alien forms of Shi'ism? Ḥaydar Āmulī reaffirmed the existence of two distinct groups within Shi'ism and Afandī, with his comments about the immiscibility of *fiqh* and *ḥikma*, corroborates this. It is the opinion of the researcher that we cannot talk about the internalism of the likes of Ibn Jumhūr being to the externalism of Shaykh Karakī in the Shi'ite context as the internalism of Ghazālī is to the externalism of Ibn Taymiyya in the Sunnite context. The externalism of the Sunnite *fuqahā'* and the internalism of the Sunnite *ḥukamā'* and orthodox Sufis were never ideal bedfellows but at least they were able to function side by side in a spirit of mutual, if begrudged, acceptance. This was because the internalism of the orthodox Sufis was theocentric in nature; however much at odds the Sunnite *fuqahā'* may have been with the Sufi adepts over the question of which facet of the Islamic revelation should receive most emphasis, they were unable to find fault with the basic doctrine of belief held by the Sufis, who, so long as they remained free of any antinomian tendencies, were tolerated and, in

some case, highly respected by the Sunnite *fuqahā'*. In Twelver Shi'ism, however, apart from the three fundamentals of belief that form the basis of internalism and which are shared with the Sunnites, namely *tawḥīd, nabuwwa* and *ma'ād*, there are two extra elements: *imāma*, or the Imamate of the Twelve Imams, and *'adl*, or Divine justice.[157] We have already noted the fact that the question of *imāma* is so central to Twelver Shi'ism that its *fiqh, ḥadīth, tafsīr* and *kalām*, although ostensibly playing the same role as in the Sunnite sphere, paid an increasingly inordinate amount of attention to the personae of the Imams themselves. The politico-historic development of the *imāma*, the continued 'absence' of the Twelfth Imam, and the natural tendency of the Muslims to gravitate in orientaton towards secondary matters all ensured that the issue of *imāma* overshadowed all other considerations. It would not be unfair to say at this point, then, that from the study of pre-Safavid and Safavid Twelver Shi'ite scholars and their writings it becomes clear that Twelver Shi'ism has two kinds of internalism: a theocentric internalism, focusing on *tawḥīd, nabuwwa* and *ma'ād*, which it has in common with the Sunnites; and an imamocentric internalism, centred on the *imāma* and the Imams. The following schema emerges:

a) Sunnite externalism: Focal point is the *sharī'a* or Islam, and the study and promulagtion of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* through four schools of jurisprudence: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali.

b) Twelver Shi'ite externalism: Focal point is the *sharī'a* or Islam, and the study and promulgation of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* though a single school of jurispru-

dence, the Ja'fari. As far as the external acts of worship (*a'māl*) are concerned, there are few differences between the Twelver Shi'ite and the Sunnite schools of jurisprudence.

c) Sunnite internalism: Focal point is belief (*īmān*) in God, the messengership of Muḥammad, and the Resurrection. According to the Quran, belief can be attained only though the acquisition of knowledge about God that is manifest in His signs (*āyāt*), which include the souls (*anfus*) of men, and the rest of the created cosmos (*āfāq*). Knowledge of self (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) together with contemplation of the signs in the cosmos should, according to internalist thinking, lead to belief. Belief itself is subject to increase and decrease, depending on the personal state of the individual. The main channel of internalist thought in the Sunnite sphere has traditionally been Sufism, although not exclusively so.

d) Twelver Shi'ite theocentric internalism: The same as above. Strictly speaking, since internalism focuses on belief, self- and God-knowledge and the three fundamentals of *tawḥīd, nabuwwa* and *ma'ād* , there can be no place for designations of *madhhab*. Algar's statement to the effect that Sunnism and Twelver Shi'ism can reach conciliation on the level of the esoteric is correct only if, by esoteric, he is referring to the theocentric internalism that is latent within Twelver Shi'ism, prevalent in the writings of scholars such as Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Jumhūr and Mullā Ṣadrā, but played down or totally ignored by the *fuqahā'*. However, conciliation is something of a misnomer, since there can be no bringing together of two outlooks which are more or less identical. The only salient difference betwen

the outlooks of, say, Ghazālī and Mullā Ṣadrā, or Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī and Ḥaydar Āmulī, as far as internalism is concerned lies in the fact that Ṣadrā and Āmulī would have relied more on the Twelver Shi'ite Imams as channels of inspiration, accepting them as leaders (*a'imma*) in the spiritual and religious sense. It is this acceptance of the Imams as spiritual guides that connects the likes of Āmulī and Ṣadrā to Twelver Shi'ism and identifies them in the eyes of others as Twelver Shi'ites.

e) Twelver Shi'ite imamocentric internalism: This centres on knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of, and belief in, the Twelve Imams of the family of the Prophet. Without this crucial element, second only to *tawḥīd* in the Shi'ite fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-dīn*), one's status as a believer in God is suspect; indeed, in sayings attributed to the Imams themselves, belief in the Imam is the key element in belief in God.[158] Although the Twelver Shi'ite externalist would not deny the importance of *tawḥīd, nabuwwa* and *ma'ād*, it is clear from his academic output that beneath the heavy external layers of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* it is the question of *imāma* that provides him with spiritual relief from the deficiencies of legalistic religion. A more detailed insight into the nature of the imamocentric internalism of the Twelver Shi'ite externalists will be given in Chapter V.

It was noted earlier that Ḥaydar Āmulī was forced to admit his failure to 'reconcile' Sufism with Twelver Shi'ism, chiefly because of the incompatibility of the Sufi concept of guidance and the Shi'ite belief in the infallible Imam. So long as Sufism — albeit in its purest, most orthodox form — kept as its ideal the re-

alization, through self- and God- knowledge, of the internal reality which made the external *sharī'a* valid, and so long as the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* retained the need for a mediatory Imam, belief in and knowledge of whom constitute the key to true faith, then a fusion of the two outlooks was never a possibility. Furthermore, the fact that the Twelver *fuqahā'* had, at the outset of the Safavid era, set themselves up as representatives of the Hidden Imam made a *rapprochement* between Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism even more unlikely. For according to the Sufis and other internalists, direct communion with God has always been a possibility, whereas for the Twelver Shi'ites one channelled one's belief through the Imam or, in his absence, through his representative. Although Sufism also had its guides — the 'poles' or *aqṭāb* — these were many; they were ordinary men singled out by God as a result of their spiritual progression and not because of their lineage. In Sufism, anyone could become an *'ālim*, a knower of God and His attributes; in the eyes of the majority of Twelver Shi'ite scholars, an *'ālim* was one who was able to communicate *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, or practise *ijtihād* and command the following (*taqlīd*) of the Twelver faithful. For the Sufis and other internalists, the *faqīh* has a limited and strictly peripheral role to play in the everyday life of the Muslim; for the Twelver Shi'ite, the *faqīh*, by virtue of his status as representative of the Hidden Imam, is a pivotal figure in Islamic social and spiritual life.[159]

As we have seen, Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr espoused a distinctly theocentric internalism, their aim being the *ḥaqīqa* as channelled through the Imams, among others. The Twelver Shi'ite externalist objection to the internalism of Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr stems not only from the disinclination of these two schol-

ars to use only Shi'ite sources in their writings but also from their elevation of the Twelve Imams to the status of *quṭb*, an elevation which would have been seen by the externalists as a relegation, given the fact that for Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr the Imams were not the only 'poles' in the universe. Yet it is the attachment of scholars and thinkers like Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr to the Twelve Imams that identifies them as Twelvers; and it is the fact that these two scholars were passionately theocentric in their internalism that has led succeeding writers to identify esotericism and gnosticism with Twelver Shi'ism. Given the flexibility of the term 'Twelver Shi'ite', however, it is difficult to say to what extent Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr were Twelver Shi'ite, if at all. As noted earlier, attachment to the family of the Prophet has always been widespread among Muslims of all jurisprudential persuasions; in pre-Safavid Iran the devotion nurtured by non-Twelvers for 'Alī and the Imams prompted some writers to talk in terms of '*tashayyu' ḥasan*' or 'moderate Shi'ism' held by non-Shi'ites. Several of the Imams figure in Sufi chains of transmission, and many Sufi Orders trace their spiritual heritage back to 'Alī himself. Such was the regard held for the Imams by the Sunnite Naqshbandī shaykh, Shah Walī Allāh of Dehli (1703 - 1762) that he wrote:

> I have come to recognise that the Twelve Imams are *quṭbs* of one and the same genealogical tree, and that consequent on their becoming extinct, *taṣawwuf* has spread about.[160]

Shah Ni'matullāh (d.834/1431) in his poetry expressed the belief that the lovers of 'Alī are perfect believers and, as such, should choose the Sunnite way,

which, he declared, was his own.[161] A contemporary example of such appropriation of the Shi'ite Imams by a Sunnite is that of Said Nursi, the Shafi'ite founder of the Nurcu movement in Turkey, who writes:

> The *ahl al-sunna* are those who possess the truth(*ḥaqīqa*), and those at the forefront (of the *ahl al-sunna*) are the Four Imams (of Sunnism) and the Twelve Imams of the *ahl al-bayt.*[162]

Devotion to the Twelve Imams clearly does not obviate affiliation to the *ahl al-sunna*; by the same token, then, it should not be seen as an automatic pointer to any kind of formal attachment to Twelver Shi'ism. Furthermore, the way in which scholars such as Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr — and, indeed, the majority of the 67 non-externalists mentioned in **Riyāḍ al- 'ulamā'** — write about the Imams clearly sets them apart from the externalist Twelver Shi'ites, who see the Imams first and foremost not as the means of theocentric internalism but as the aim of imamocentric internalism. It is the imamocentrism of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* that militates against any kind of *rapprochement* between their approach to Islam and that which embraces the theocentric internalism of scholars such as Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr. *Rapprochement* would have been possible only if the *fuqahā'* had reoriented the position of the Imams in their belief system and viewed them not as almost superhuman figures who must be 'known' and believed in, and whose representatives (i.e the *fuqahā'*) must be obeyed, but as channels of theocentric internalism and individuals who have no genealogical claim to sainthood (*wilāya*). This, however, would mean the virtual 'de-Shi'itization' of Twelver Shi'ism, leaving

something along the lines of Ibn Jumhūr's ideal of one sect with one belief, and with it a drastic demotion of the role of *faqīh* and *mujtahid* in the Twelver Shi'ite sociopolitical and religious sphere.

3.10 The non-externalists: their milieu and teachings

A study of Safavid sources in general and **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** in particular reveals three basic types of non-externalist orientation among the Safavid scholars and literati: the antinomian 'wandering' dervish or *qalandar* ; those scholars connected officially to one of the Sufi orders; and the *ḥukamā'* and philosophers operating independently from any formal Sufi brotherhood.

The term *qalandar* covers in its historicval usage a wide range of dervish types. It was loosely applied in the Persian sphere to any wandering *faqīr* or mendicant, but it was also adopted by certain groups and even distinctive orders were formed, hence the problem of defining the term. Shihāb al-dīn Suhrawardī describes the *qalandariyya* as those who are so possessed by the intoxication of 'tranquility of heart' that they respect no custom and reject the regular observances of society and mutual relationship. Maqrīzī records that around 610/1213-14 the *qalandariyya* made their first appearance in Damascus, having been introduced there by the Persian refugee, Muḥammad Yūnus al-Sāwajī (d.630/1232-33), and a *qalandarī* hostel or *zāwiya* was built by the Ḥaydarī group there in 655/1257-58.[163] A *qalandarī* /Ḥaydarīhostel in Tabriz is mentioned by the author of **Rawḍat al-jinān wa jannāt al-janān,**[164] and our sources make frequent references to the presence of these shabbily-dressed, morally reprehensible wandering dervishes in

Safavid society. They appear as story-tellers in coffee-houses; as *du'ā-gū* or those who beg for money and pray for those who donate; and as street-corner preachers who were generally held in low esteem by the people.[165] The antinomianism of the *qalandariyya* obviates their being categorized according to the internalist/externalist schema. The true internalist, despite his relative lack of regard for the academic pursuit of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, does not disregard the outward, external profession of belief that is encapsulated in practices such as prayer and fasting. Thus the *qalandariyya* , despite their rejection of worldly desires and pursuits, do not qualify as internalists in the pure sense of the word.

Organised Sufism, the politico-historical development of which has already been touched upon, remained the most important potential channel of internalist teaching throughout the Safavid era. State and *fuqahā'* hostility towards the organised Sufi orders, plus the infusion into the Sufi tradition of practices that were contrary to the spirit of internalism, militated against the ability of the Orders to communicate fully the ideals of Sufism to the people at large.[166] In theory, if not in practice, the Sufi path was inspired by a basically internalist outlook. An examination of the prose essays of one of the leading Sufi masters, Shah Ni'matullāh Walī, shows that the subjects which most interested him and his disciples were generally internalist in nature; in this respect, the Ni'matullāhiyya is no different from any of the other organised Sufi brotherhoods. Taking Shah Ni'matullāh's work as an example, one sees that the emphasis first and foremost is on the Quran and the traditions as the major sources of inspiration. Interpretations of the Quran (*tafsīr*) or individual verses of the Quran such as the famed 'Light Verse',[167] plus

interpretations of Prophetic traditions, play a large part in Sufi teachings. Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī's **Mat͟hnawī**, although obviously of a totally different style to the prose works of Shah Ni'matullāh, is nevertheless an internalist work that relies heavily upon Quranic verses for its inspiration. Internalist exegesis is concerned fundamentally with the implications of a certain verse or word for the individual who is seeking the path to self-knowledge and the gnosis of God, whereas externalist exegesis comprises rarely more than a brief exposition of the historical event underlying the revelation of the particular verse in question. Interpretations of the works of other Sufi masters also feature prominently in the Sufi internalist output: Shah Ni'matullāh, for example, produced four works on Ibn al-'Arabī's **Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam** alone.[168]

The concept of *īmān* and its concomitants forms the backbone of internalist teachings such as those typified by the treatises of Shah Ni'matullāh. Belief, unity (*tawḥīd*) and trust (*tawakkul*) are explored extensively. Metaphysical explanations of problems such as free-will and Divine determination (*qadar*), the Divine Essence, His names and attributes etc. are given. Expositions of ontological problems, the stages of being, the five planes of existence (*ḥaḍarāt al-khamsa*), the archetypes (*amt͟hāl*), cosmology, creation (*khilqa*), manifestation (*tajallī*), the concept of man as the microcosm and the cosmos as the macrocosm, and the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) — all can be found in the work of a typical Sufi writer such as Shah Ni'matullāh. Treatises on jurisprudence are conspicuous by their absence, and the only time the externals of Islam are discussed is when the symbolism of the acts of worship such as prayer and fasting are explained. Sufi vocabulary and

concepts are also explained in full in the treatises of Shah Ni'matullāh: he wrote separate essays on particular concepts and terms, such as the meaning and secrets of true belief, unity, poverty and trust. In other works he discusses the inner meanings of words such as reveller (*rind*), Sufi, Sufism, *quṭb*, miracle (*mu'jiza*) and (*karāma*), annihilation (*fanā*), permanence (*baqā*), love (*'ishq*), inspiration (*ilhām*), and so on. In theory, then, once the exclusivist wrappings of each individual Sufi order with its own particular methods of teaching and promulgation are peeled back, there is revealed in the Sufi tradition a basically theocentric internalism that transcends the designations of *madhhab* and sectarianism. However, as we have seen, the organized Sufi orders fared badly in Safavid Iran — not so much as a result of their internalism but rather because of the fact that they were orgnaised and thus posed a potential political threat —and their potential as the most influential channel of internalist teaching was severely hampered.

Individual gnostics with no formal Sufi affiliations fared much better, however, and the gradual demise of organised Sufism in the Safavid period did not mean the end of internalism. Nearly all of the internalists listed in **Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'** are noted for their penchant for Sufism, although only in a handful of cases are formal affiliations mentioned. The main internalist channels were *falsafa* and *ḥikma*, although individual internalists also appear as simple preachers (*wā'iẓ*) or poets. One scholar who attempted to communicate internalism to the masses was the preacher, 'Abd al-Wāḥid Wā'iẓ al-Jīlānī.[169] Although the dates of his birth and death are unknown, it is clear from references in his work that he studied under the ubiquitous Shaykh Bahā'ī, although it is not certain whether

he studied the *'aqlī* or the *naqlī* sciences with him.[170] Wā'iẓ al-Jīlānī's writings were almost exclusively internalist, with many treatises written about the reality of the soul (*nafs*) and the path to self-purification and the gnosis of God. What makes him stand out particularly is the fact that he wrote most of his works in Persian; moreover he wrote in simple, lucid sentences and in a style more suited to the pulpit than the *madrasa*. He wrote over 50 treatises, many of them in his mother tongue, and was at home in verse as in prose.[171] Unlike the great gnostic philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā, more about whom shall appear shortly, Jīlānī aimed his teachings directly at the ordinary people to whom he preached. He is probably the most prolific author of internalist works in Persian in the whole of the Safavid period, yet he has remained totally overlooked by Western and, to a large degree, Iranian scholars.

In his treatise **Mi'rāj al-samā**, an explanation of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* is given which draws heavily for influence on Ghazālī's **Iḥyā 'ulūm al-dīn**. Jīlānī says that there are three types of scholar:

> Among the believers there are the 'people of transaction' (*ahl-i mu'āmala*), who know the commands (*awāmir*) of God but do not know Him; there are the 'people of apparent knowledge' (*ahl-i 'ilm-i ṣūrī*) who know God through rational proofs (*barāhīn-i 'aqlī*) but who do not care to know His commands; and there are the 'people of certainty' (*ahl al-yaqīn*), and they possess real knowledge (*'ilm-i ḥaqīqī*) of both God and His commands.[172]

Jīlānī qualifies his classification by saying that the *ahl-i mu'āmala* form the

majority of Muslim scholars. Their remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, he says, is on their tongues but not in their hearts; their fear is of the people (*khalq*) and not of their Lord; they are humble in public (*ẓāhir*) but not in private, in front of God. They are the *fuqahā'* and the transmitters (*rāwiyān*) of traditions: one may have recourse to them only as much as is strictly necessary.

The (*ahl-i 'ilm-i ṣūrī*) form the minority of Muslim scholars. They are theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and philosophers (*falāsifa*); if they have belief, they keep it in their hearts but not on their tongues; they fear mistakes of judgement and intellect (*khaṭa'-i 'aql*) but not sins; and they are humble before God but not before the people. One may have recourse to them and mix with them in moderation (*ikhtilāṭ-i kam*).

The (*ahl-i 'ilm-i ḥaqīqī*) remember God in their hearts and on their tongues; they are scared of inner pride (*ghurūr-i qalb*) and of external sins. They are the prophets (*mursalīn*), the saints (*awlīyā*), the gnostics (*'urafā*), and the pure Sufis (*ṣūfiyān-i ṣāfīḍamīr*), and they are the true teachers (*mu'allim*) of Muslims.[173]

Jīlānī quotes what he claims is a Prophetic tradition in which Muḥammad is reported to have instructed the Muslims to 'ask questions from the *'ulamā'*, associate with the *ḥukamā'*, and keep close company with the *kubarā'*' .[174] According to Jīlānī, the word *'ulamā'* in the tradition signifies the *fuqahā'*, from whom legal rulings on matters of sacred law are obtained; the word *ḥukamā'* refers to the *ahl-i 'ilm-i ṣūrī* , who may be mixed with in moderation; while the *kubarā'* (lit. the exalted or great ones) are the saints, gnostics and pure Sufis, whose company should

be kept as much as possible since it provides benefit in this world and in the next. The wretchedness (*shaqāwa*) of our society, Jīlānī continues, stems from a dearth of scholars with real knowledge and an overabundance of ignoramuses (*juhalā'*) who imagine that simply by knowing transactions (*mu'āmalāt*) they can give themselves the exalted title *'ulamā'*. Ask any *faqīh* how many times the words *Allāh akbar* must be recited during the ritual prayer, asserts Jīlānī, and he will spend a whole day recounting the various traditions concerning the queston; ask him the inner (*bāṭinī*) meaning of the very same words and he will tell you that he has no time to spare.[175] The vast majority, however, are liars and thieves (*kadhdhāb wa shayyād*) whose only desire is for fame and material ease.[176]

Jīlānī also offers an insight into the methods of internalist teaching. The main focal points for communication of non-externalist thought in the Isfahan of his day were the Shaykh Luṭfullāh mosque, which Shah 'Abbās I had constructed for Shaykh Luṭfullāh al-'Āmilī al-Maysī, and the *madrasa* of the same name. Jīlānī mentions that many 'real scholars' (*'ulamā'-i ḥaqīqī*) studied and taught at the Shaykh Luṭfullāh *madrasa*, including Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī and Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī. Jīlānī himself says that the 'grace of God' (*luṭf Allah*) allowed him on several occasions to preach in the Luṭfullāh mosque, although his main teaching was done in private, 'in the manner of the prophet Noah.' [177] Jīlānī mentions the existence of regular *majālis* or meetings which would be held in what were presumably the private houses of notables and other scholars: the *majālis-i ikhwān* were held specifically for instruction in Islamic morals (*akhlāq*) and etiquette (*adab*), while the *majālis al-mukhliṣīn* were held for instruction in gnosis

(*ma'rifa*), and were no doubt designed to cater for those who were more advanced on the gnostic path. Jīlānī mentions with fulsome praise the feelings of brotherhood (*ukhuwwa*) that were generated at these meetings and laments the fact that true *'ilm*, i.e. *ma'rifat Allah* must remain hidden, like a 'moon-faced beauty beneath a veil' (*chū māhrukh-i rū girifta*).[178]

Scholars such as Jīlānī appealed directly to the masses as well as to like-minded individuals of their own intellectual standing. The tradition of gnostic philosophy or *'irfān*, epitomised in the so-called 'school of Isfahan' founded by Mīr Dāmād and best exemplified in the persona and teachings of Mullā Ṣadrā, was, on the other hand, channelled through writings that are primarily theoretical and which were directed at that time mainly towards the elite among the small highly literate class of Twelver internalist scholars. Mīr Dāmād, the son-in-law of Shaykh Karakī, was, as has already been noted, a syncretist in the sense that he combined both theocentric internalist and externalist elements in his work. He was, after all, an authority on the scriptural sciences, but he was before everything else a *ḥakīm* who opened up new vistas for Islamic philosophy and who was responsible for the rapid spread of *ḥikma* through his numerous writings and the training of many students.[179] The *ḥakīm-i ilāhī* , or theosopher, who emerged from Mīr Dāmād's 'school' in Isfahan was a direct ideological descendant of earlier Muslim *ḥukamā* and philosophers such as Fārābī, Ḥaydar Āmulī, Rajab Bursī, Ibn Turka, Naṣīr al-dīn Ṭūṣī, Suhrawardī, Ibn Sīnā, Ghazālī, and Ibn al-'Arabī. Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, the most famous of Mīr Dāmād's students, followed his teacher's attempts to blend the teachings of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī within a Twelver Shi'ite theo-

centric internalist frame of reference but went much further by making a synthesis of all the major intellectual perspectives of nearly a thousand years of Islamic intellectual life before him: the peripatetic philosophers, the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophers, the Prophet and the Imams, the Sufis — all of these were unified and harmonised in the 'transcendent theosophy' (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyya*) of Mullā Ṣadrā. More importantly, Mullā Ṣadrā reiterated the need for direct internalist objectives in the pursuit of philosophy — hence the term 'gnostic' philosophy or *'irfān* — and advocated sincerity of purpose (*khulūṣ*), single-minded devotion (*tawajjuh*) and the light of belief (*nūr al-īmān*) in philosophic pursuits, which alone will result in intuitive certainty and direct appropriation of the truth. This, for Ṣadrā, is what is meant by *ḥikma* or wisdom. Ṣadrā denounces those who use philosophy for other than purely internalist aims, to satisfy worldly desires and to gain power and fame, who end up with a sterile philosophy, full of doubts and uncertainties, and far from the intended goal, which is to know God and man's destiny.[180] Knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) is the whole objective of philosophy, according to Ṣadrā, and philosophy is the crown of all knowledge.

Beneath all of the designations given to Ṣadrā, be he philosopher or theosopher, Sufi or theologian, he was before everything else a diehard, self-confessed internalist who devoted himelf almost exclusively to *'irfān* and who kept almost total silence on the question of the particular ritual or legal prescriptions and the accepted structure of legal interpretation of the Quran and the Traditions. His understanding of the Quran and Traditions is based largely on the interpretations summarized in the works of Ibn al-'Arabī, although Ṣadrā gives no hint anywhere

of any formal Sufi affiliation on his part. His selection of sayings of the Twelver Shi'ite Imams is restricted mainly to the more penetrative, internalist teachings of Imam 'Alī and Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Ṣadrā's position *vis-a-vis* Twelver Shi'ism is similar to that of Āmulī and Ibn Jumhūr in that he saw the Imams as channels of theocentric internalism rather than as the objects of imamocentric internalism. His understanding of the reality of the Imams and the questions of *imāma* and *wilāya* distances him from the popular understanding prevailing among the majority of Twelver Shi'ite scholars, i.e the *fuqahā'*; all of Ṣadrā's works are directed towards a deeper questioning of the most basic popular assumptions as to what it means to 'know' the Imams, as his **Ḥikmat al-'arshiyya** (Wisdom of the Throne) demonstrates.[181] His belief in *'irfān* as the true goal of all knowledge, his scant regard for the scriptural sciences as an academic pursuit, and his choice of popularly suspect writers and thinkers for the inspiration behind the articulation of his belief in all his works — all of these set him at serious odds with the *fuqahā'* of his time, so much so that part of his life was spent in exile.[182] A study of his life, works and philosophy has been done elsewhere adequately. However, a brief review of his only Persian work, **Sih Aṣl** would not be without direct relevance to the question of externalism and the definition of the term *'ilm.*

On one level, **Sih Aṣl** is a theosophical treatment of the 'science of the soul' (*'ilm al-nafs*), which Ṣadrā maintains is the 'key to all sciences'. In fourteen chapters Ṣadrā outlines the path that an individual must take in order to know the reality of his own soul and to refine it in order to reach the ultimate goal: knowledge of and belief in God, His angels, His revelation, His messengers and

the Last Day. Ṣadrā also describes the obstacles — the diseases of the soul — that the traveller (*sālik*) is likely to meet on his journey. On another level, and more importantly from the point of view of this thesis, **Sih Aṣl** constitutes a severe and often vitriolic attack upon the externalists and their teachings; as such it is one of the most direct and coherent of its kind to have been written, second only perhaps to Ghazālī's **Iḥyā**, parts of which it resembles. The fact that **Sih Aṣl** was written in Persian suggests that Ṣadrā intended it to be read by as wide and academically varied an audience as possible; the work seems to have been directed expressly at the largest group of potential readers: the less sophisticated and relatively uneducated Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*, who already tended to perceive the tradition in which Ṣadrā was working as being without inherent value and even heretical and anti-Islamic. The antagonism that the treatise created among the externalists may have been reflected in the fact that it has gone unmentioned in all but one of the standard biographical dictionaries which cover the life and works of the Safavid scholars.[183] That Ṣadrā took a great risk in producing so acerbic an attack on the externalist community, on the majority of scholars of his time, is beyond doubt: **Sih Aṣl** comes across as a passionate outpouring of personal feeling, and of concern for an outlook — the internalist outlook — which by the reign of Shah 'Abbās I was in grave danger of being swamped and suffocated by the forces of externalism. 'The time for patience is past,' writes Ṣadrā in the introduction,'and now I must speak out.' [184]

Ṣadrā's anti-externalist strictures, woven as they are in and out of his description of the path the soul must take to self- and God-knowledge, focus on the

twin concepts of *īmān/islām* and *'ilm*. There is a world of difference, he says, between the Islam which is professed by the tongue and the *īmān* which is held by the heart. To declare oneself to be a Muslim does not necessarily mean that one believes in the tenets of Islam, despite the fact that one may on the surface be performing the external actions that a Muslim is supposed to perform.[185] The real believer is one who is deeply cognizant (*'ārif*) of God, His angels, His messengers, His books, His prophets, and the Resurrection.[186] Ṣadrā points out that the kind of Islam that is adhered to through custom and inheritance actually acts as a barrier between the individual and true belief.[187] True belief, which, Ṣadrā says, in Sufi terminology is called *wilāya*, cannot enter a heart that has not reformed itself, has not cast out all the attachments it has formed to this world.[188] Superficial knowledge, nominal professions of Islam, prayers that are peformed by way of custom, fasts and pilgrimages that are carried out through force of habit — all of these conceal a deep attachment to the world and are not conducive to belief or to salvation in the hereafter.[189] Belief in the hereafter, opines Ṣadrā, is one of the greatest pillars of the religion. Yet few people are able to base their belief in the hereafter on cogent proofs; rather, most people accept the existence of the afterlife on hearsay, and thus prefer to 'imitate' (*taqlīd*) rather than use their God-given intellects to reason for themselves. Ibn Sīnā, he says, whom everyone calls the 'master of Islamic philosophy', is one such person whose belief in the hereafter was imitative.[190] True belief in God and the hereafter, unlike imitative belief, can be gained only through self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*), which is the key to all sciences.[191] Ṣadra considers *ma'rifat al-nafs* to be part of the 'science of Divine

unity' (*'ilm al-tawḥīd*), about which he writes:

> The people of this age know nothing of the 'science of Unity' or of God-knowledge (*'ilm-i ilāhī*); in my whole life I have met none that has such knowledge. And as for (self-knowledge), the scholars of today are totally devoid of it, not to mention the people. And most believe only in things which they can immediately experience (*maḥsūsāt*).[192]

Whoever fails to gain self-knowledge cannot know God, says Ṣadrā.[193] Furthermore, without self-knowledge, all actions are baseless and without value.[194] True knowledge is that which is gained through the gradual discovery and unveiling of the truth (*mukāshafāt*), not that which deals with transactions (*mu'āmalāt*) or other branches of knowledge;[195] the true knowledge postulated by the Quran, and which lay in the possession of the Prophet and his companions, was not *fiqh* or *kalām*, astronomy or philosophy. True knowledge — the knowledge of self and of God — is derived from contemplation of the inner meanings (*buṭūn*) of the Quran and the Traditions, and not from the detailed, formal study of their outer husks (*ẓawāhir*).[196] Ṣadrā mentions the verse which states that the Quran is reserved only for ther pure (*muṭahharūn*), a verse which is also used as the basis for the *fiqh* ruling which states that someone who is not ritually clean (*ṭāhir*) cannot touch the Quran. Ṣadra asserts that *ṭahāra* (purity) describes the state of the heart and not of the body; it is clear that those engaged in formal sciences (*'ulūm-i rasmī*) such as *fiqh* have no need of ritual purity to be able to study those sciences. Those sciences, he observes caustically, are more conducive to personal ambition

and worldly desires than to purity of heart and intention.[197] He also cites the previously mentioned Quranic verse which states that only 'those with knowledge' (*'ulamā'*) truly fear God; that knowledge which inspires fear of God, says Ṣadrā, is most certainly not *fiqh*.[198]

Having outlined the meaning of *īmān* and the distinction which should be drawn between it and Islam, and having established that *'ilm* as adumbrated by the Quran is the knowledge of the self (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) which leads to the knowledge of God's unity (*'ilm-i tawḥīd*), Ṣadrā turns his attention to the purveyors of externalism:

> Some of those who appear to be learned but who are evil and corrupt, some of the theologians (*mutakallimūm*) who are devoid of correct logic and stand outside the circle of rectitude and salvation, those who follow the religious law (*mutasharri'*) yet know nothing of the law of servitude to God, and have strayed from the path of belief in the origin of man (*mabda'*) and his return to God (*ma'ād*), have tied the rope of blind imitation (*taqlīd*) around their necks and made the denigration of the dervishes their slogan.[199]

Many of those who attribute knowledge and learning to themselves, says Ṣadrā, are unaware of the realities of the soul, of its states and its diseases. They profess by the tongue to believe in the hereafter but are constantly in the service of the *nafs*, this world and their own caprices.[200] Most of them consider the hereafter as they consider this world; consequently the acts of worship they perform are meaningless, and the endless jurisprudential investigations they make into these

acts of worship is even more meaningless. As a result, their worship amounts to nothing more than self-worship.[201] They have made the abode of this world their *qibla* and the doors of kings and sultans their prayer-niche unto which they turn in supplication and in expectation of their daily bread.[202] They spend their time in conversation with those whose hearts are dead and whose natures are evil. Addressing the *muḥaddithūn* in particular, he says that the real science which enables one to understand the realities of *īmān* is 'the science of uncovering' (*'ilm-i mukāshafa*), and asks them:

> Why do you deny this (i.e. *mukāshafa*)? Why do you say that it is easy or useless? And why do you acccord so much importance to sciences that can be mastered in six months, and call the purveyors of those sciences 'scholars of religion' (*'ulamā'-i dīn*)? If true knowledge is that which you possess, which can only be learnt through traditions and from teachers, why does God, in many places in the Quran, forbid the blind imitation of others in matters of belief and in the fundamentals of the faith?[203]

Most externalists, according to Ṣadrā, suffer from the diseases of the soul. If only they would recognise these diseases and admit that their belief and actions are void, they might be able to help themselves. However, it is difficult for them to admit their weaknesses, given the fact that 'having spent time studying and copying out the teachings and writings of the old masters, memorizing their words...they have become enamoured of the praise which is heaped upon them by the masses, by the flattery lavished upon them by idiots.' [204] Knowledge of

transactions (*mu'āmalāt*) should only be to the point of necessity, says Ṣadrā, whereas to know too much — as the *fuqahā'* do — when such knowledge is not required of one will be a burden in the hereafter. Not only is it a waste of time, it brings about incalculable pride; every kind of wretchedness that has befallen the people has been caused by the pride of the purveyors of *'ilm-i ẓāhir* (superficial or external knowledge) and action without belief. The holy Imams were killed, ulitmately, not by daggers or by poison but by the aggravation caused to them by the pseudo-*'ulamā'* (*'ulamā'-i 'ālim-namā*). Ṣadrā further berates the externalists for pandering to the whims of the rich and powerful, and for cultivating the admiration of the ignorant believers merely in order to attain fame, wealth and worldly glory.[205] One of the results of their devilish pride and the insiduous whisperings of their concupiscent souls is that most externalists — especially the theologians — rely upon their deficient reason and upon corrupted and falsified Traditions.[206] Basing their teachings on pure hearsay, the theologians wish to correct and perfect the laws of God without the basis of gnosis and purely by means of the senses, which are limited and deficient. Many are the theologians who debate and argue about the essence, attributes and names of God, yet describe Him in a way that would, were they to use the same words to describe a village headsman, put him to shame. Most externalists cannot be callled human, let alone men of knowledge; since belief in the hereafter is contingent upon self-knowledge, and since most of these so-called scholars are bereft of such knowledge, it may be said that most of the self-styled *'ulamā'* are little better than infidels (*kuffār*).[207]

Such was the invective of Mullā Ṣadrā against a force that was perceived to

be taking the commanding position in the socio-religious life of the Iranian people, literate and illiterate alike, during the mid-Safavid period. One wonders whether it was not his philosophical bent but rather his anti-externalist stance that set so many of the externalists against him in later years. Whatever the case may be, **Sih Aṣl** remains the most damning anti-externalist document ever written by a self-confessed Twelver Shi'ite against the majority of his co-religionists.

3.11 The reigns of Shah Ṣafī and Shah 'Abbās II

In his treatise **Himam al-t̲h̲awāqib**, Shaykh 'Alī al-Farāhānī, whose work on the prohibition of tobacco has already been mentioned, notes with considerable distaste the fact that Shah Ṣafī (1629-42) was less than enthusiastic about propagating Twelver Shi'ism, and that not only had he ceased to have close and cordial relations with the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* but he had also become lax towards Sunnism.[208] One manifestation of Shah Ṣafī's tolerant attitude was his commissioning of a Persian translation of Ghazālī's **Iḥyā**; the *fuqahā'* duly protested, demanding that repressive measures be taken against the Sunnites. Shah Ṣafī refused.[209] All in all it is clear that with the advent of Shah Ṣafī the tide was beginning to turn, and the trend was set in favour of non-externalism, which was to reach its zenith during the reign of Shah 'Abbās II (1642-66).

Shah 'Abbās II's patronage of the non-externalist scholars of his day stemmed more, it would seem, from his own indifference to the externals of Islam — according to a historian of his time he was constantly inebriated[210] — than from any inherent personal penchant for the non-externalist orientation *per se*. His desire

to ecourage the non-externalists was also manifest in his choice of Sayyid Ḥusayn b. Rafīʿ al-dīn Muḥammad Khalīfa Sulṭān, also known as Sulṭān al- 'ulamā' as his vizier in 1055/1645-46.[211] Sayyid Ḥusayn (d.1066/1655-56) was a syncretist who tried to emphasize the gnostic element in the Traditions of the Twelve Imams, and had served as vizier under both Shah 'Abbās I and Shah Ṣafī. His appointment to the office of vizier by Shah 'Abbās II was vehemently opposed by Mīrzā Qāḍī, the *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan, whom the Shah promptly dismissed.[212] It is interesting to compare this incident, which was emblematic of a serious decline in the influence of the externalist *fuqahā'*, with Shah Ṭahmāsp's dismissal of Mīr Ghīyāṯẖ al-dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī Shīrāzī a century earlier and consider the extent to which the relative fortunes of externalist and non-externalist had been reversed.

The circle of independent non-externalists and loosely Order-affiliated Sufi adepts patronised by Sayyid Ḥusayn and Shah 'Abbās II was an illustrious one which included Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhījī, Muḥammad Bāqir Sabziwārī, Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī, Āqā Ḥusayn al-Khwānsārī and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī— figures which span the whole spectrum of Twelver Shi'ite non-externalism. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d.1070/1659-60), the father of Muḥammad Bāqir, was an adherent of the Ḏẖahabī Order; Shah 'Abbas II is said to have had great respect for him and commissioned a commentary by him on Ibn Bābūya's **Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh.**[213] 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhījī (d.1072/1661-62) , a student and son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā, expounded in his Persian work **Gawhar-i murād** the principles of the Twelver Shi'ite *imāma* within a framework of gnostic philosophy in which the knowledge of the soul and the knowledge of God feature

strongly.[214] Muḥammad Bāqir Sabziwārī(d.1090/1679-80) wrote books on *fiqh* as well as commentaries on treatises of philosophy, and was something of a syncretist in the mould of Shaykh Bahā'ī.[215] Rajab 'Alī Tabrīzī, the hermit philosopher and gnostic, was visited by Shah 'Abbās II on several occasions; the king was said to hold the recluse in great awe.[216] Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī (d.1098/1686-87), another syncretist, wrote treatises on *fiqh* and philosophy, having studied the scriptural sciences under Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī and the rational sciences under Abū al-Qāsim Mīr Findiriskī (d.1050/1640-41), the renowned Sufi philosopher and recluse.[217] Above all, however, it was Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī who received the lion's share of royal favours and attention, with Shah 'Abbās II ordering his personal physician, Ḥakim Kūchak — himself a philosopher of no uncertain worth — to build a Sufi hostel for Kāshānī in Isfahan. Kāshānī, also a student and son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā, was as comfortable writing treatises on *fiqh* as he was writing on philosophy, although it was clear where his priorities lay.[218] In the treatise **Raf' al-fitna**, Kāshānī distinguishes clearly between two types of knowledge: *'ilm al-ẓāhir* and *'ilm al-bāṭin*, the former denoting knowledge of the sacred law (*sharī'a*) and the latter consisting of knowledge of the truth (*ḥaqīqa*). The second, says Kāshānī, is the true science or *ḥikma*, from which the real knowledge of man's origin (*mabda'*) and 'return' (*ma'ād*) can be extracted. He also attacks the *fuqahā'*, whom he accuses of working for fame and power and who are considered to be *'ulamā'* by the masses but who are, in reality, ignorant (*juhalā'*).[219] In true Akhbārī fashion he inveighs against the orthodox *fuqahā'* on account of their attempts to forcibly foist the concept of *nahy 'an al-munkar* (forbidding the for-

bidden) on a people that have no grasp of the concept of belief and submission.[220] The sacred law, i.e. the commandments of the Prophet and the Imams, should, he says, be understood directly with the aid of God and without the mediation of the *fuqahā'*, whose practice of *ijtihād* and condonation of *taqlīd* amount to an adulteration of the sacred law.[221] Such was the relationship between Kāshānī and Shah 'Abbās II — whose patronage of non-externalists had led to his being given the soubriquet 'dervish-loving Shah' (*shāh-i darwīsh-dūst*) — that Kāshānī was able to treat lightly the Shah's orders and requests without feeling the least fear of royal displeasure or retributiuon. In 1065/1654-55, the Shah ordered Kāshānī by letter to go to Isfahan to perform the Friday prayer there. Kāshānī, who at the time was residing in Kashan, took several months to reply, saying that he preferred to stay and perform the Friday prayer in his own town with his own people, and that to come to Isfahan 'would be at odds with my desire for peace and isolation.' 222

Shah 'Abbās II's disenchantment with the mainstream Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* was evident also from his patronage of the eminent Akhbārī theologian and *faqīh*, Khalīl b. Ghāzī al-Qazwīnī (d. 1089/1678-79), also known as Burhān al- 'ulamā'. A student of both Shaykh Bahā'ī and Mīr Dāmād, Qazwīnī was initially a lecturer and administrator of the holy shrine in Rayy before moving to Mecca and finally settling in Qazvin. In 1064/1653-54, Shah 'Abbās II gave a lavish banquet for all of the eminent scholars of Qazvin, and singled out Qazwīnī to write a Persian commentary on Kulaynī's **al-Kāfī**. Qazwīnī immediately reciprocated the royal attention by pointing out to the Shah that his reign had been foretold in the Tra-

ditions concerning the occultation as one of the auspicious events leading up to the reappearance of the Hidden Imam.[223] Not only did Qazwīnī oppose Sufism and *ḥikma*, he also inveighed aginst the teachings of the astronomers and physicians, asserting that all knowledge must come directly from the traditions of the Imams such as those collated in **al-Kāfī** ,all of which are correct and must be acted upon without question.[224] Shah 'Abbās II's two most trusted personal physicians, the brothers Muḥammad Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Qummī, were also gnostic philosophers and Sufi adepts of the Akhbārī school.

Shah 'Abbās II had thus surrounded himself with scholars whose religious orientations were anathema to the orthodox Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* not only in the sense that philosophy and *ḥikma* were favoured above *fiqh* but also because of the Akhbārī stance of many of them. This *melange* — non-externalism, Akhbārī *fiqh* and royal patronage — threatened to undermine the whole edifice of orthodox Twelver Shi'ite externalism and deal a *coup de grace* to the nascent concept of *ijtihād* and *taqlīd*, thereby changing the face of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran forever. What the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were in need of was a charismatic spokesman — another Shaykh Karakī perhaps — and an externally religious-minded Shah who could be easily influenced. Little could they have known, during what for them must have been the dark days of Shah 'Abbās II's reign, that they would soon be provided with both.

1. Nicolas Sanson, *The Present State of Persia* (Paris, 1695), p. 128.
2. See: Vladimir Minorsky, 'The Poetry of Shah Ismā'īl I' in *BSOAS*, vol. 10 (1942), p. 1047a. On the veneration of Ismā'īl, see: Erika Glassen, 'Schah Ismā'īl, ein Mahdi der Anotolischen Turkmenen?' in *ZDMG* 121 (1971), pp. 61-9.
3. The Hakluyt Society, *Travels of Venetians in Persia* (London, 1873), p. 206.
4. Yūsufī, *Surūr al-'ārifīn*, p. 6.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*, p. 7.
7. The question of the occultation of the 12th Shi'ite Imam will be discussed in Chapter V. For a more detailed and comprehensive treatment, see: Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982) and Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).
8. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-shī'a* (Beirut, 1391/1971-72), vol. 18, p. 101.
9. Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma* (Tehran, 1395/1975-76), p. 81.
10. *ibid.*, p. 10. See also: Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūṣī, *al-Fihrist* (Mashhad, 1972), pp. 268 and 363.
11. Norman Calder, *The Structure of Authority in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence* (Unpublished Ph. D. thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1980), pp. 73-4.
12. *ibid.*, pp. 163-5.
13. *ibid.*, pp. 84-5, 112, 125-6 and 147-51.
14. Calder, *The Structure of Authority*, p. 157.
15. Muḥsin al-Amīn al-'Amilī, *Khiṭaṭ Jabal 'Āmil* (Beirut, 1983), p. 182.
16. M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *La Syrie a l'epoque des Mamelouks* (Paris, 1923), pp. 70, 74 and 246; J. Sourdel Thomine, 'Inscriptions arabes de Karak Nuh' in *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales* 13 (1941-51), pp. 71-84.
17. al-'Āmilī, *Khiṭaṭ Jabal 'Āmil*, pp. 77-8.
18. *'ālim* here denotes 'scholar' in general, i.e. in the transformed or corrupted sense of the word.
19. For biographical details of Shahīd al-Awwal, see: Mīrzā 'Abdullāh Afandī al-Iṣbahānī, *Riyāḍ al- 'ulamā' wa ḥiyāḍ al-fuḍalā* (Qum, 1401/1980-81), vol. 5, pp. 185-91.
20. *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 365-86.
21. See: *Anonomous History of Shah Ismā'īl* (British Library Ms. Or. 3248 [Ross Anonomous]), p. 113a.

22. For a list of Shaykh Karakī's works, see: Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, pp. 441-60.

23. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1098.

24. Karakī made clear his stance in his controversial treatise on *kharāj*; see: Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1964-5.

25 A. K. S. Lambton, '*Quis Custodiet Custodes*' in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 6 (1956), p. 133.

26. Muqaddas Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585) and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Qaṭīfī (still alive in 947/1540-01) were two leading Safavid scholars who actively dissociated themselves from the state. Those who deemed the performance of the Friday congregational prayer unlawful in the absence of the Imam were those who were most likely to regard kingly authority with suspicion. See p. 169 of this chapter and also the section on *intiẓār* in Chapter V.

27. Mīrzā Makhdūm Shīrāzī, *al-Nawāqid li-bunyān al-rawāfiḍ* (British Museum Ms. Or. 7991), p. 98b.

28. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 450.

29. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1964.

30. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 1965.

31. *ibid.*

32. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 2, p. 67.

33. See: Iskandar Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālamārā-i 'Abbāsī*, ed. by E. Yarshater, transl. by R. Savory (Boulder, Colorado, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 294-330 on the question of Ismā'īl II and Sunnism.

34. A classic example of Sunnite learned criticism of Shi'ite practices such as *taqīyya* can be seen in: Taqī al-dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunnat al-nabawiyya fī naqd kalām al-shi'at al-qadariyya* (Cairo, 1962), vol. 1, p. 43.

35. See: Nasrollah Pourjavady/Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Kings of Love: The Poetry and History of the Ni'matullāhī Sufi Order* (Tehran, 1978), pp. 47-9 and *passim*.

36. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 2, p. 581.

37. *ibid.*

38. *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 581

39. *ibid.*

40. Ibn Rūzbihān, quoted in: Nūrullāh Shūshtarī, *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq*, ed. by Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1376/1956-57), vol. 1, pp. 25-6.

41. Jean Aubin, 'Ṣāh Ismā'īl et les notables de l'Iraq persan' in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 2 (1959), p. 59.

42. *ibid.*

43. For details of Karakī's anti-Sufi treatises, see: Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 444.

44. See: Roger Savory, 'A 15th Century Propagandist at Harāt' in *American Oriental Society, Middle West Branch, Semi-centennial volume* (London, 1969), pp. 196-97; Tabrīzī, *Rawḍāt al-jinān*, vol. 1, pp. 98-104, 214-16 and 416-18.

45. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 1, p. 308.

46. Dānishpaẕhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1658.

47. *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 1664 for details of Shahīd al-thānī's treatise on *ijtihād*.

48. See: Hakluyt Society, *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London, 1873), vol. 49, part 2, p. 223. See also: Jean Aubin, 'La politique religieuse des Safavides' in *Le Shi'isme Imamite* (Paris: Colloque de Strasbourg), p. 239.

49. Mīrzā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣrābādī, *Tadhkira-i Naṣrābādī* (Tehran: Furūghī, 1352 Sh./1973-74), pp. 207-8.

50. For a brief account of Naqshbandī fortunes in early Safavid Iran, see: Hamid Algar, 'The Naqshbandī Order: A Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance' in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 44 (1976), in particular p. 139.

51. Qāḍī Aḥmad Ghaffārī, *Tārīkh-i jahān-ārā* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 302; K. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16 und 17 Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1966), p. 70.

52. In this context, see: Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 188-91, 200.

53. Dānishpaẕhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1312; Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'*, p. 262.

54. See: Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, pp. 108-21 for comprehensive biographical details on the father of Shaykh Bahā'ī.

55. *ibid.*, p. 115.

56. The *farmān* appears in *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, pp. 455-60.

57. Dānishpaẕhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1964.

58. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 132.

59. See: Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, pp. 229-50 for potted biographies of the major scholars — Twelver Shi'ite and Sunnite — of the early Safavid period.

60. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 129 and *passim*.

61. Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, pp. 230-1.

62. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 454. The Quranic verse quoted is 2:142.

63. *ibid.* The Quranic verse quoted is 2:145.

64. *ibid.*

65. Shah Ṭahmāsp, *Tadhkira-i Shāh Ṭahmāsp* (Calcutta, 1912), p. 14.

66. Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, p. 231.

67. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 88.

68. *ibid.*, *passim*.

69. For details of Ṭahmāsp's *largesse*, see: Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, pp. 229-244.

70. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 454.

71. Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, p. 237.

72. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 125.

73. *ibid.*

74. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 133.

75. Qāḍī Aḥmad Qummī, *Khulāṣāt al-tawārīkh* (Berlin: Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, MS Orient no. 2202), pp. 255a-256.

76. A. H. Nawā'ī (ed.), *Asnād wa mukātabāt-i tārīkhī; Shāh 'Abbās-i Awwal* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), vol. 1, pp. 118-19.

77. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 4, p. 32.

78. Munshī, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, p. 237.

79. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 246.

80. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 2, pp. 62-75.

81. Munshī, *Tārīkh-i ālam-ārā*, vol. 1, p. 321.

82. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 318.

83. For an account of 'Abbās I's reconstruction of his armed forces, see: Roger Savory, *Iran Under The Safavids* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), pp. 78-83.

84. Naṣrullāh Falsafī, *Zindagānī-i Shāh 'Abbās-i Awwal* (Tehran, 1332 Sh./1953-54), pp. 186-7.

85. Savory, *Iran Under The Safavids*, p. 83.

86. On the Nuqtawiyya heresy, see: Maḥmūd Naṭanzī, *Nuqāwat al-āthār fī dhikr al-akhyār*, ed. by I. Ishrāqī (Tehran, 1350 Sh./1971-72), pp. 515-24.

87. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 119.

88. See: Jean Aubin, 'Les Sunnites du Larestan et la chute des Safavides' in *Revue des etudes islamiques*, vol. 33 (1965), p. 152 for examples of anti-Sunnite measures taken by Shah 'Abbās.

89. Representatives of foreign monastic orders such as the Carmelites, the Augustinians and the Capuchins were given permission to establish convents and to actively proselytise. See: Savory, *Iran Under The Safavids*, pp. 100-101.

90. Savory, *Iran Under The Safavids*, p. 101.

91. Quoted by Arjomand in *The Shadow of God*, p. 112.

92. The rise to prominence of Isfahan, particularly under the auspices of Shah 'Abbās, has been charted by Savory in *Iran Under The Safavids*, especially Chapter 7.

93. Shaykh Karakī's great-grandson, Mīrzā Ḥabībullāh, and the latter's son, Mīrzā Mahdī, were apparently assimilated into the 'aristocracy' as inheritors of vast landed estates in central Persia accumulated by their forefathers. Both acquired the title 'Mīrzā' whilst in the service of the Safavid rulers; Mīrzā Ḥabībullāh became *ṣadr* for Shah Ṣafī in 1041/1631-32 and Mīrzā Mahdī succeeded him in 1064/1653-54. See: Iskandar Beg Turkumān/ Muḥammad b. Yūsuf, *Ḏhayl-i tārīkh-i ālam-ārā-i 'Abbāsī* (Tehran, 1317 Sh.), p. 91.

94. For biographical details of Mīr Dāmād, see: Ṣadr al-dīn Shīrāzī, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* , ed. by J. Āshtīyānī (Mashhad, 1346 Sh./1967-68), pp. 83-90.

95. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 1, p. 118.

96. Sir John Malcolm, *History of Persia* (London, 1815), vol. 1, pp. 371-2.

97. Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn*, ed. by M. S. Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1386/1966-67)

98. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil*, ed. by A. Ḥusaynī (Najaf, 1385/1965-66).

99. Muḥammad Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'* (Tehran, n.d. [c. 1880]) . A printed edition (Tehran, n.d.) has also been used for this study; it will be referred to as *Qiṣaṣ II.*

100. Dānishpaẕhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 2, p. 608.

101. See, for example, the collection of Twelver Shi'ite traditions on *tawḥīd* in: William C. Chittick (ed.), *A Shi'ite Anthology*, (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1980), pp. 23-65.

102. See: Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'*, pp. 330-4 for an interesting account of the harrowing experiences undergone by one such aspiring *faqīh*, Shaykh Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī, in his quest for externalist knowledge.

103. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 6, pp. 147-8.

104. *ibid.*, p. 144.

105. Shaykh Muḥammad Lāhījī, *Sharḥ-i gulshan-i rāz*, ed. by K. Samī'ī (Tehran, 1337 Sh./1958-59).

106. Iṣfahānī's treatise appears in its entirety in *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 4, pp. 273-6.

107. For biographical details of Kamāl al-dīn Darwīsh, see: Karl-Heinz Pampus, *Die Theologische Enzyklopädie Biḥār al-Anwār* (Bonn, 1970), pp. 55-6.

108. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 6, p. 238.

109. *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 94; vol. 3, pp. 252 and 429.

110. *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 96; vol. 6, p. 95.

111. *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 109.

112. *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 66.

113. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 1.

114. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 23.

115. The relationship between Safavid Iran and the Ottoman empire has been dealt with extensively in: Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman - Safavid conflict* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983). Chapters 3 and 4 are particularly relevant.

116. See p. 123 of this chapter.

117. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 1, p. 112; Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 5, p. 192.

118. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 5, p. 154.

119. *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 192.

120. Mirzā Makhdūm Shīrāzī, *al-Nawāqid*, pp. 90b-91a.

121. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 6, p. 167.

122. *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 315-16.

123. *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 283.

124. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 185.

125. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ* al-'ulamā', p. 251.

126. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 1, p. 26.

127. See: *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 35-6 for biographical details.

128. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ardabīlī, *Majma' al-fā'ida wa al-burhān* (Tehran, 1272/1855-56), *passim.*

129. E. Kohlberg, 'Akbārīya' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, p. 717.

130. Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 224-25.

131. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 146.

132. For an account of Qummī's attacks on Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī and Mullā Khalīl Qazwīnī, both of whom were favoured by Shah 'Abbās, see: Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* (Tehran, 1339 Sh./1960-61), vol. 1, pp. 177-8.

133. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 2, p. 261; Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1358.

134. See Chapter IV, page 261.

135. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 2, pp. 264-5.

136. Yūsufī, *Surūr al-'ārifīn*, pp. 14-15.

137. Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris, 1971), vol. 3, p. 254.

138. Hamid Algar, 'Shi'ism and Iran in the eighteenth century' in: T. Naff and R. Owen (eds.), *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (London, 1977), p. 288.

139. Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: The Macmillan Press, 19820, p. 22. *bāṭin* is explained as the inner or secret meaning of the Quran while *ẓāhir* is the outer or apparent meaning; *ta'wīl* is the hermeneutic or allegorical interpretation of the Quran while *tafsīr* is the literal interpretation and straightforward clarification of its verses; *ḥaqīqa* is the Truth of the revelation, and *sharī'a* is the Law.

140. See p. 99, footnote 8.

141. See: Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, pp. 50-1 for an explanation of the term *jary*.

142. Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610-11), the author of *Majālis al-mu'minīn* and *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq*, while identifying himself as a Twelver, fits into the picture neither as an externalist nor an internalist; although he appears to champion the Sufi cause, his zeal for Twelver Shi'ism leads him to force every renowned scholar, poet and *literateur* of the past into the Shi'ite mould. Rūmī, for example, is on the flimsiest of evidences classed by him as a staunch Shi'ite. For details of Shūshtarī's life and works, and of his zeal in putting the Twelver tag on all and sundry, see: Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 5, pp. 265-75, especially p. 269.

143. See: Henry Corbin and Osman Yahya, *La Philosophie Shi'ite* (Tehran, 1969), pp. 6-15.

144. Ḥaydar al-Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār wa manba' al-anwār* (India Office Library, MS Arberry 1349), p. 121b.

145. *ibid.*, p. 2a-b.

146. *ibid.*, pp. 108b-109a.

147. *ibid.*, p. 105a.

148. *ibid.*, p. 19a.

149. *ibid.*, p. 24b.

150. *ibid.*, p. 122a.

151. Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī, *al-Mujlī* (Tehran, 1329/1911), p. 165.

152. *ibid., passim.*

153. *ibid.*, p. 110.

154. A brief biographical sketch of Ibn Abī Jumhūr can be found in: Dānishpazhūh: *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 625-27.

155. Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* , vol. 1, p. 135.

156. al-Aḥsā'ī, *al-Mujlī*, pp. 371 and 376.

157. Although both Sunnites and Twelver Shi'ites agree that God is just (*'ādil*), the Sunnite theologians for the most part believe that whatever God does is just, whereas the Twelver Shi'ites, along Mu'tazilite lines, believe that God does whatever is just. For a Twelver Shi'ite exposition of the concept of Divine justice, see: Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, *'Adl-i ilāhī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1398/1977-78).

158. See Chapter 1 of the present work, especially pp. 21-24.

159. In Sunnite externalism the *faqīh* is pivotal insofar as the purely religious orientation of the community is concerned; in Twelver Shi'ism, however, with the question of occultation and *ijtihād/taqlīd* , the *faqīh* is theoretically much more powerful than his Sunnite counterpart.

160. See: J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi 1703-1762* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), p. 72.

161. Shah Ni'matullāh, *Kulliyyāt-i ash'ār-i Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī*, ed. by J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), pp. 684-5.

162. Muṣṭafā Zakī al-'Āshūr, *Badī' al-zamān Sa'īd Nūrsī* (Köln: Mihrab, n.d.), p. 165.

163. Taqī al-dīn Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* (Cairo, 1326/1908-09), vol. 2, p. 433.

164. Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī Tabrīzī, *Rawḍāt al-jinān wa jannāt al-janān* (Tehran, 1344 Sh./1965-66), vol. 1, pp. 467-8.

165. Sanson, *The Present State of Persia*, pp. 153-4; Rafael du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660*, ed. by C. Schefer (Paris, 1890), pp. 216-7.

166. 'Faction-fighting' between various Sufi groups during the reign of Shah 'Abbās, who actually encouraged the phenomenon, was one such practice. See: Falsafī, *Zindagānī- Shāh 'Abbās-i Awwal*, vol. 2, p. 238.

167. Verse 24:35.

168. Pourjavady/Wilson, *Kings of Love*, p. 48.

169. See: Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 3, pp. 384-6 for biographical details and list of works.

170. Muḥammad 'Alī Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* (Tehran, 1367/1947-48), vol. 4, p. 269.

171. S. Ṣafarī, *Armaghān al-awliyā'* (Mashhad, 1344 Sh./1965-66), vol. 1, p. 75.

172. *ibid.*, pp. 76-7.

173. *ibid.*, p. 78.

174. *ibid.*, p. 80.

175. *ibid.*, p. 82.

176. *ibid.*, p. 85.

177. *ibid.*, p. 88.

178. *ibid.*, p. 89

179. On Mīr Dāmād and the 'school of Isfahan', see: Henry Corbin, 'Confessions extatiques de Mīr Dāmād' in *Mélange Louis Massignon* (Damascus, 1956), pp. 331-78.

180. For example, Ṣadrā denounced Ibn Sīnā for pursuing medicine and a professional career despite his capacity for what Ṣadrā considered to be the highest art – philosophy. see: Mullā Ṣadrā-i Shīrāzī, *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, ed. by M. R. al-Muẓaffar (Tehran, 1378/1958-59), vol. 4, p. 119.

181. See: James Winston Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton University Press, 1981), especially part 2, section C.

182. For biographical details of Mullā Ṣadrā, see: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ṣadr al-dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran, 1978), especially Chapter 2.

183. *Rawḍāt al-jannāt, Rayḥānat al-adab, Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā', Riyāḍ al-'ulamā', Amal al-āmil* and *Mustadrak al-wasā'il* all fail to mention *Sih Aṣl*; only in *Rawḍat al-ṣafā* is the treatise cited. See: Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Mulḥaqāt-i rawḍat al-ṣafā* (Tehran, 1275/1858-59), vol. 8, p. 125.

184. Ṣadr al-dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Risala-i sih aṣl* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1360 Sh./1981-82), p.42.

185. *ibid.*, p. 91.

186. *ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

187. *ibid.*, p. 117.

188. *ibid.*, pp. 113-21.

188. *ibid.*, p. 132.

190. *ibid.*, p. 69.

191. *ibid.*, p. 40.

192. *ibid.*, p. 123.

193. *ibid.*, p. 46.

194. *ibid.*, p. 55.

195. *ibid.*, p. 96.

196. *ibid.*, p. 104.

197. *ibid.*, p. 105.

198. *ibid.*, p. 100.

199. *ibid.*, p. 39.

200. *ibid.*, p. 48.

201. *ibid.*

202. *ibid.*, p. 50.

203. *ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

204. *ibid.*, p. 87.

205. *ibid.*, p. 88.

206. *ibid.*, p. 80.

207. *ibid.*, p. 51.

208. ʻAlī Ṭughā'ī al-Farāhānī, *Himam al-thawāqib*, (Tehran: Library of Madrasa-i Sipahsālār, MS. no. 1845)

209. *ibid.*, chapter 5.

210. Muḥammad Ṭāhir Waḥīd Qazwīnī, *ʻAbbāsnāma* (Arak, 1329 Sh./1950-51), p. 131.

211. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-ʻulamā'*, vol. 3, p. 54.

212. Walī Qulī Shāmlū, *Qiṣaṣ al-khāqānī* (British Library Add. MS. no. 7656), p. 52.

213. Muḥammad Taqī's life and works are reviewed more comprehensively in Chapter IV of the present work.

214. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-ʻulamā'*, vol. 3, pp. 114-5.

215. *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 44-5.

216. *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 283-5.

217. *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 57-60.

218. *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 180-2.

219. Muṣhin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Raf' al-fitna* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-i Markazī-i Danishgāh-i Tihran, MS. no. 3303), pp. 1-7.

220. M. T. Dānishpazhūh, '*Dāwarī miyān-i pārsā wa dānishmand*' in *Nashriyya-i Dānishkada-i Adabiyyāt-i Tabrīz*, vol.9 (1336 Sh./1957-58), pp. 127-8.

221. Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Ā'īna-i shāhī* (Shiraz, 1320 Sh./1941-42), p. 5.

222. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 2668.

223. *ibid.*, pp. 1357-8; Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā'*, vol. 2, pp. 261-66.

224. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1358.

Chapter IV

The life and works of 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī

4.1 Introduction

No full, objective biography of 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī has yet been written, the main reason for this being the paucity of source material. The most comprehensive account to date is given in **al-Fayḍ al-qudsī** , written in 1884 by Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Taqī al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī.[1] Although it contains much valuable information on Majlisī's forefathers, teachers, students and works, it contains very little on the man himself. The emphasis lies, as one might expect, on the importance of Majlisī's position in the history of Twelver Shi'ite learned scholarship. The same may be said of earlier accounts of Majlisī in *rijāl* collections such as **Lu'lu'at al-Baḥrayn** and **Rawḍāt al-jannāt**.

Fayḍ al-qudsī itself appears to be an almost direct translation of an earlier work, **Mir'āt al-aḥwāl**, written in 1219/1804-05 by Āqā Aḥmad Kirmānshāhī, a descendant of Majlisī, and thus it is clear that most contemporary accounts of Majlisī go back to the same source.[2] References to Majlisī and, occasionally, critical comments or illustrative anecdotes which do not appear in the aforementioned standard accounts of his life can be found in other works — usually with no mention of an original source. Such information is scattered and usually comes to light only incidentally. A reference work such as the **Fihrist** of Muḥammad Taqī

Dānishpazhūh, for example, contains many such nuggets of information.[3]

There is scarcely any common ground between the supporters and critics of Majlisī in their appraisal of his life and achievements, although they are unanimous in acknowledging his fame, importance and — in the context of Twelver Shi'ism — his orthodoxy, not to mention his colossal output. To his supporters, Majlisī is 'unique in his own time';[4] he is the 'seal of the mujtahids' (*khātim al-mujtahidīn*);[5] he is the *mujaddid* (renewer of Islam) divinely appointed for the 11th *hijra* century, and as such he is the inheritor of the Prophet Muḥammad foretold by the latter himself when he informed his community that a 'renewer' or 'restorer' would follow him in each succeeding century.[6]

Criticisms of Majlisī are numerous and more often than not they are harsh. His detractors have labelled him a fanatic and a bigot; a ruthless oppressor of minorities; a charlatan, timeserver and imposter who forged traditions in support of an oppressive regime; and the one who was ultimately responsible for the downfall of the Safavid regime and the havoc that ensued as a result of the Afghan invasion.[7]

On the whole, Majlisī's detractors seem to be concerned not with what Majlisī actually said but with what he appears to have done. The word 'appears' is used deliberately for it seems that those who have lambasted Majlisī from the sociopolitical angle, citing his alleged persecution of religious minorities and also the fact that his propagation of outdated, superstitious and fanatical religious concepts undermined the Safavid state and expedited its downfall, have unwittingly based their criticisms of him on a misinterpretation of historical facts. The most striking

example of this concerns the post of *mullābāshī* and the erroneous attribution of that title to Majlisī by Vladimir Minorsky, the translator and editor of the anonymously penned manual of Safavid administration, **Tadhkirat al-mulūk**, which will be dealt with later on.[8] Suffice it to say that no-one has studied Majlisī and his works solely from the point of view of religious ideology and practice, especially in the context of internalism/externalism and the concepts of *īmān, islām* and *'ilm*. Even Said Arjomand, who has touched upon the religious aspect of Majlisī's writings more than anyone else, implies that Majlisī's Shi'ism is the definitive one, and thus misses the point.[9]

Available source material reveals the fact that Majlisī's biographers focus their attention almost exclusively upon his vast literary output, concentrating chiefly on the enormous corpus of Twelver Shi'ite traditions known as **Biḥār al-anwār**. To them, Majlisī's greatness is gauged primarily by the volume of his writings and the extent of the influence that his works had, and continue to have, on the Twelver Shi'ite community in Iran and further afield. This is not too difficult to understand once one has realised that Majlisī was the spokesman and representative *par excellence* of Twelver Shi'ite externalism and of those externalist scholars who attained prominence towards the end of the Safavid period. Concerned primarily with the exoteric trappings of Twelver Shi'ism, with the practical aspects of Islam rather than *īmān*, this group succeeded in redefining Twelver Shi'ism in terms suitable to their own preoccupation with one particular branch of Islamic knowledge, namely *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. It was under Majlisī that Twelver Shi'ite externalism became truly orthodox, while all other views were rejected and often forcibly repressed.

The exponents of the new orthodoxy, which one critic was moved to call the *dīn-i Majlisī*,[10] did not merely shift the emphasis from *īmān* to Islam; this did occur, but as already seen in previous chapters it is by no means a phenomenon particular to the *fuqahā'* of 17th century Iran. What actually occurred was a dramatic change in the face of the kind of Shi'ism adumbrated by the founding fathers of the faith — a Shi'ism which, according to Mihdi Bāzargān, is a 'crystallization of the most exalted ideals that are Islam.'[11] Belief in the superiority of the family of the Prophet as interpreters of the Islamic revelation — a belief which, on a purely religious level, is by no means unacceptable to non-Shi'ites[12] — was manipulated by the new Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy not only to preserve and deepen the rift between Twelver Shi'ism and its ideological rivals but also to further externalize Islam in a particularly overt Twelver Shi'ite externalist manner. The move from theocentrism to imamocentrism took its greatest strides during the Safavid period, and it was under the auspices of Majlisī, whose major achievement was to codify the disparate sayings of the Imams into a more or less coherent whole, that the externalization of Islam in its Twelver Shi'ite form reached its zenith. If, indeed, Majlisī's stature is to be gauged by his output, by the charisma accorded to him by the Twelver masses, and by the readership of the works bearing his name, then there is little doubt that he is the outstanding figure of the age. However, when one realises that hardly anything that Majlisī wrote can be called original in any sense of the word, and that he added nothing to the development of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* in the way that his predecessors such as Shaykh Karakī had done, and when one considers the fact that even in his own limited field as collector and transmitter of

narrations he was far from scrupulous in his methodology, then one begins seriously to wonder whether Majlisī can qualify to be called an *'ālim* — even in the Safavid sense of the word — at all. The over-estimation of Majlisī's value as a scholar in Twelver Shi'ite learned history is not an isolated case: similar misconceptions exist, for example, concerning Shaykh Bahā'ī.[13] This view of Majlisī as the greatest scholar of his age, with all its attendant eulogizing, can only be a product of the superficiality of externalist critique; equally shortsighted is the attitude of those who would, on the basis of Minorsky's misidentification of Majlisīas *mullābāshī*, diabolify him.[14]

4.2 The Majlisī family

Muḥammad Bāqir was not the only member of his family to leave his mark on the sociocultural and religious life of Safavid and post-Safavid Iran, although undeniably he is the most famous. Many of Muḥammad Bāqir's ancestors and descendants were writers, judges, preachers and *fuqahā*, and the overall impression one gets is of a classical 'learned family', one which bestowed coninuity on the cultural life of several epochs. The emergence of the Majlisī family as a whole is closely linked with the renaissance of the Twelver Shi'ite *ḥadīth* sciences, and it is from this family in particular that a genuine Persian development of Twelver Shi'ism obtained its impulses. Furthermore, the transition from mainstream theocentrism to Twelver Shi'ite externalist imamocentrism, which found its deepest channel of expression in the works of Muḥammad Bāqir, was mirrored in the gradual change in the general religious orientation of the family, from the orthodox

Sufism of pre-Safavid Iran to the heterodox externalism nurtured by Muḥammad Bāqir and his descendants.

4.2.1 The forefathers of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī

The earliest known ancestor of Muḥammad Bāqir was Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad b. 'Abdullāh b. Isḥāq b. Mūsā b. Mihrān Sipāhānī (d. 430/1038-39), the celebrated author of **Ḥilyat al-awliyā', Tārīkh al-Iṣfahān** — also known as **Ḏhikr-i akhbār-i Iṣfahān** — and a compliation of forty traditions concerning the Hidden Imam entitled **al-Arba'īn fī Mahdī-i Āl-i Muḥammad**. It has not been clearly established whether Abū Nu'aym subscribed to the Twelver Shi'ite school or not; the fact that he collected traditions on the Hidden Imam does not necessarily imply Twelver Shi'ite leanings, since there have been many Sunnite authors who have produced similar compilations. In fact, Ibn-i Shahrāshūb in **Ma'ālim al-'ulamā'** descibes Abū Nu'aym as an *'āmī*, i.e. a Sunnite; Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī in **Qāmūs al-rijāl** calls him 'a simple-minded Sunnite.' It is not surprising, therefore, to see that the leading scholars of the Safavid period went to great pains to reclaim Abū Nu'aym as a Twelver Shi'ite and thus spare Muḥammad Bāqir the embarrassment of having a Sunnite Sufi for an ancestor.[15]

The more recent forefathers of Muḥammad Bāqir can be discussed with greater surety, beginning with Shaykh Ḥasan, Muḥammad Bāqir's great-great-grandfather. Shaykh Ḥasan lived in the second part of the 10th/16th century and was relatively well known as a *mujtahid* who helped to promulgate the new state religion of Twelver Shi'ism.[16] Shaykh Ḥasan's son, Kamāl al-dīn Darwīsh Muḥammad b.

Ḥasan al-'Āmilī al-Naṭanzī al-Iṣfahānī, studied under both Shaykh Karakī and the 'Second Martyr', Zayn al-dīn b. 'Alī al-'Āmilī al-Shāmī, and was reportedly the first scholar to make the traditions of the Twelver Shi'ites accessible to the public at large in the city of Isfahan.[17] Several important scholars studied under him and narrated traditions on his authority, the most notable being Muḥammad Bāqir's father, Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, and 'Abdullāh b. Jābir al-'Āmilī. Kamāl al-dīn Darwīsh's daughter — unnamed in the sources as are most of those on the distaff side — was marrried to one Maqṣūd 'Alī al-Majlisī, the grandfather of Muḥammad Bāqir. Maqṣūd 'Alī was the first to carry the honorary epithet 'al-Majlisī', given to him reportedly on the grounds that his *majālis* (sermons or lectures) were of the most edifying and excellent kind. He is also known to have written poetry, and it possible that he penned verses under the name Majlisī: an ode attributed to him is cited in **Tadhkirat al-qubūr**.[18] Another possible explanation for the name Majlisī is that Maqṣūd 'Alī may have hailed from a small village called Majlis on the outskirts of Isfahan.[19] It is certain, however, that he was the first in the family to carry the name and thus one must regard the later account of how Muḥammad Bāqir's swaddling clothes (*qundāq*) were blessed in a secret *majlis* by the Hidden Imam as a fabrication.

The union of Kamāl al-dīn Darwīsh's daughter with Maqṣūd 'Alī al-Majlisī brought forth two sons, Muḥammad Ṣādiq and Muḥammad Taqī. Of the former, next to nothing is known. Muḥammad Taqī, born in 1003/1594-95, was a contemporary of Mullā Ṣadrā and studied under scholars such as Shaykh Bahā'ī and 'Abdullāh b. Ḥusayn al-Shūshtarī. Of his early life little is known, although he

himself claims to have been versed in all of the religious sciences from an extremely early age. In his commentary on Shaykh Ṣadūq's **Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh**, he writes:

> Praise be to the Lord of all worlds! I knew everything at the age of four! That is to say, I knew all about God, prayers, and Heaven and Hell. I would pray the night prayers in the Ṣafā mosque (in Isfahan) and I would perform the morning prayer there in congregation. I would advise the other children and instruct them in the verses of the Holy Quran and in the Traditions, as my father — God's mercy be with him — had instructed me.[20]

Muḥammad Taqī's piety and steadfastness in prayer and meditation were such, writes Āqā Aḥmad Kirmānshāhī, that 'he was accused of being a Sufi.'[21] The extent and seriousness of Muḥammad Taqī's alleged inclination towards Sufism cannot be easily gauged, although it is clear that he often frequented Sufi gatherings and enjoyed cordial relationships with various members of the Sufi brotherhoods. This much is admitted by Muḥammad Bāqir himself, who was later to deny his father's penchant for non-externalism by explaining it away as a form of *taqīyya*. To Muḥammad Taqī is attributed a short treatise entitled **Tashwīq al-sālikīn** (Encouragement for those on the Sufi path), in which he professes allegiance to the Ḏhahabiyya Order.[22] The author also confirms the belief of Ḥaydar Āmulī, who had declared that Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism were fundamentally one and the same thing. Sufism and gnosis, he says, must be defended against the 'formal sciences' (*'ulūm-i rasmī*) of the legalistic *'ulamā'*.[23]

Evidence of Muḥammad Taqī's Sufi inclinations may be seen as being strengthened by the fact that he was patronized by Shah 'Abbās II, who favoured the Sufis and whose reign marks the zenith of 'high' Sufism and gnostic philosophy. 'Abbās II went to great lengths to show respect to the Sufi literati. He commissioned Muḥammad Taqī to write a Persian commentary on Shaykh Ṣadūq's **al-Faqīh**, with the impressively royal title **Lawāmi'-i Ṣāḥibqirānī** (Augustean Lights). Although such evidence points to some kind of attachment to the non-externalist fraternity, it is not inconceivable that Muḥammad Taqī may have temporarily adopted the Sufi cause in orther to further his own aims. The issue is confused further by Dānishpazhūh's assertion that a trip to Najaf in 1038/1628-29 brought about a radical change in Muḥammad Taqī's outlook: he turned away from Sufism and inclined towards the '*qishrīgarī*' (superficial or 'hide-bound' legalism) of the *fuqahā'*.[24] Another account tells of how Muḥammad Taqī, during a visit to the shrine of Imam 'Alī, had a dream in which the Imam instructed him to settle and teach in Isfahan, which was gaining in importance as the main centre of Twelver externalism. In the light of conflicting evidence, then, the Sufism of Muḥammad Taqī must remain a matter of conjecture.

Muḥammad Taqī enjoys a prominent place in the gallery of learned Twelver Shi'ites on account of the fact that he was the first to spread the narrations and teachings of the Imams on a wide scale in Persian — although his output was nowhere near as extensive as that of his son. Apart from the aforementioned **Lawāmi'** he also wrote a commentary on the famous prayer manual of the 4th Imam, Zayn al-'ābidīn, entitled **Ṣaḥīfa-i Sajjādiyya** in both Arabic and Persian.

Other Persian works include a commentary on the **Zīyārat al-jāmi'a** and various treatises on the Friday prayer, foster-relationships, *ḥajj*, etc. He also wrote a treatise on dreams, in which he recounts many of his own dream experiences, most of which involve the Imams.[25]

Muḥammad Taqī incurred the wrath of several of the *fuqahā'* of his day on account of the ambiguities surrounding his religious and ideological stand. His staunchest opponent was the vehemently anti-Sufi *faqīh*, Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī, who wrote a fiery polemical tract in refutation of Sufism, which was answered in kind in a treatise attributed to Muḥammad Taqī.[26] Mīr Lawḥī, more about whom will be said in Chapter V, was another avowed enemy of Muḥammad Taqī — as indeed he was of Muḥammad Bāqir — and it is reported that his dislike was so intense that he saw fit to desecrate the tomb of Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym, the Majlisīs' illustrious Sufi forefather.[27] Generally speaking, however, the few sketches of his life that do exist paint Muḥammad Taqī in a favourable light: a man of extreme piety and asceticism whose paramount aim was to 'spread the Islamic *sharī'a*' — an overtly externalist ambition — and propagate the teachings of the Imams as handed down in their traditions. In the latter he proved to be an able forerunner of his more famous son. Muḥammad Taqī died in 1070/1659-60 and is buried in Isfahan.[28]

4.3 Muḥammad Bāqir's birth and formative years

Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī was born in 1037/1627-28 in the *dār al-'ilm* in Isfahan, one of seven children born to Muḥammad Taqī and his wife, who was

related to Shaykh 'Abdullāh b. Jābir al-'Āmilī, a colleague of Muḥammad Taqī and also, in later years, a teacher of Muḥammad Bāqir. Most sources agree on Muḥammad Bāqir's year of birth, encapsulated in the chronogram *jāmi' kitāb biḥār al-anwār.*[29]

His hagiographers outline certain details concerning his entrance into the world that are clearly designed to enhance his image as a charismatic and divinely sanctioned religious leader. His swaddling clothes, it is related, were blessed by the Hidden Imam in a secret *majlis* which took place in a dream or vision experienced by Muḥammad Taqī.[30] Another account tells how Muḥammad Taqī, having spent a long night in tearful prayer and supplication, sensed that anything he might ask from God would most certainly be granted. At a loss as to what to ask for, he suddenly heard the cries of the infant Muḥammad Bāqir and immediately asked God to make his son 'the propagator of the religion and *sharī'a* of the Prophet' and to grant him success in all his endeavours. The author concludes that Muḥammad Bāqir's brilliant career was undoubtedly the result of his father's prayer.[31] Muḥammad Taqī is also said to have forbade his wife to suckle the child whenever she was in a state of ritual impurity (*jināba*).[32] Such a prohibition has no Islamic basis whatsoever but may — in the minds of the simple Twelver Shi'ite believers — have added to the aura of purity that is seen naturally to surround a man of religion. Similar traditions exist, of course, in the hagiography of the Prophet and the Imams, and inevitably filter through to colour the life stories of the *fuqahā.*

Regrettably, little is known of Muḥammad Bāqir's formative years. Being the son of an already accomplished scholar, he would have received instruction in various aspects of Islam at a very early age in his father's home. The flexibility of the traditional Islamic *madrasa* was such that the young Muḥammad Bāqir would have been able to pick and choose the teachers — even moving from one town to another if necessary — that he needed to instruct him in the basic yet comprehensive range of Islamic sciences in which a budding scholar was expected, but not obliged, to be versed. Muḥammad Bāqir undertook a full programme, studying most of the subjects on offer: *fiqh, ḥadīth*, biography of the learned Twelver Shi'ites (*rijāl*), principles of the transmission of traditions (*dirāya*), Arabic language and literature, logic, theology and philosophy.[33]

A typical Twelver student at the time of Majlisī would be most likely to opt for specializaton in either the *aqlī* sciences such as theology or philosophy, or the *naqlī* branches such as *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, according to his own personal inclination. As already pointed out, the polarization of the *'aqlī* and *naqlī* sciences as far as learning and teaching biases are concerned is merely another manifestation of the false division between matters of *īmān* and matters of external action, between the *uṣūl* and the *furū'*. A scholar would, however, be expected to have ample theoretical knowledge of both fundamentals and secondary principles. Given the fact that a teacher's *forte* was either wholly in the *'aqlī* or wholly in the *naqlī* sciences — but rarely in both — a student would attend the lectures of one teacher or set of teachers for the former (i.e. *'aqlī*) and another teacher or set of teachers for the latter, i.e the *naqlī* components of the informal *madrasa* curriculum. Despite the

fact that *'aql* and *naql* are supposed to complement and complete each other, it often happened that a student would attend the lectures of scholars who were at ideological loggerheads with each other. Muḥammad Bāqir, for example, studied under both his father and Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī, who were sworn enemies:

> Majlisī the First (i.e. Muḥammad Taqī) did not consider Muḥammad Ṭāhir an *'ālim*, and Muḥammad Ṭāhir was wont to inveigh publicly against (Muḥammad Ṭāhir) from the pulpit, yet Majlisī the Second (i.e. Muḥammad Bāqir) sat as a willing and grateful student sat at the feet of both. His thirst for knowledge and the belief that the acquisition of it was a religious duty tended to override any idea of divided loyalties.[34]

The leaders of the Twelver Shi'ite world of learning were first and foremost professors of *manqūl*, the scriptural sciences that form the basis of externalism. *Ma'qūl* was traditionally the preserve of the the indigenous body of Persian scholars which had enjoyed supremity before the influx of the immigrant *fuqahā'*, although as we have seen there were individuals who were able to combine the two branches without preponderating too heavily towards either one. Since the fundamentals of *īmān* are connected to the disciplines of *ma'qūl*, the latter was an essential component in a student's course of study. However, since *ma'qūl* covers a field in which a great number of non-externalists — i.e. gnostics, philosophers and Sufis, all bogeys of the Twelver *fuqahā'* — were proficient, for most the study of *ma'qūl* was reduced to little more than a brief, theoretical survey of the fundamentals of belief. These were treated as concepts that have to be known rather than fully

understood, assimilated and then utilized as the indispensible basis and *raison d'être* of one's life as a believer, be one a scholar or a layman. An exposition of the fundamentals of belief boils down, then, to little more than the mechanical assimilation of facts and the clinical acquisition of a set of theological principles with which one can prove the truth and existence of the five *uṣūl al-dīn*, i.e. *tawḥīd, nabuwwa, ma'ād, imāma* and *'adl*. For the externalist, these *uṣūl* are presented as ideas that are to be believed in summarily as the basis for the much more crucial task of complying with the externalia of the faith, crystallized in the *sharī'a* and the laws of jurisprudence. For the externalist, the much safer course — and, considering its sociopolitical value, much the securer — was the total reliance on the sayings of the Imams, often to the exclusion of reason altogether. According to Majlisī:

> No human being can understand the excellent meanings of the Holy Quran and thus we must have recourse to the Pure Imams of the Holy Family (*tawassul bi a'imma-i 'itrat*). It is through them that we can understand the words of God; anyone who tries to think about God without having recourse to the Imams is doomed to perdition (*ḍalāla*), for surely theirs is the best guidance.[35]

Although the use of reason to fathom the complexities of belief was not proscribed by the Twelver Shi'ites, indiscriminate reasoning was clearly deemed reprehensible, and the believer was encouraged to depend solely on the the sayings of the Imams, the best interpreters of which were, according to the externalists, the *fuqahā'* and *muḥaddithūn*. Theocentric *kalām* had also long since been overshad-

owed by an imamocentric theology that used reason to prove the legitimacy of the *imāma*, so that when one reads about a scholar such as Majlisī having studied the *'aqlī* sciences one may be sure that a large proportion of that scholar's theological schooling will have centred upon proofs of the *imāma*, the occultation and long life of the Hidden Imam, and so on.

Muḥammad Bāqir was initially instructed in *ma'qūl* by his father. If Muḥammad Taqī was a follower of the Ḏhahabiyya Order then it also possible that he would have introduced his son to the teachings and practices of the Sufi adepts. However, there is nothing in the primary sources to suggest that Muḥammad Bāqir had anything but a deep aversion to all understandings of Islam that steered away from the externalist norm. Suggestions such as those made by Said Arjomand that Muḥammad Bāqir was a Sufi who executed a sharp *volte-face* in mid-career remain totally unjustified.[36] What Muḥammad Bāqir did turn away from early on in his teaching career was the instruction of pupils in *ma'qūl*, more about which will be said later. Nevertheless, Muḥammad Bāqir studied under some of the most notable exponents of *ma'qūl* of his time. Among such teachers are Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, an Akhbārī in matters of *fiqh* and reportedly an adherent of the Naqshbandiyya. Along with Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, Kāshānī and Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī make up the celebrated 'three later Muḥammads' of the Safavid period, whose major works (**al-Wāfī, Wasā'il al-shī'a**, and **Biḥār al-anwār**) are compared in terms of impact with the canonical works of the 'first three Muḥammads', i.e. Kulaynī, Shaykh Ṣadūq and Shaykh Ṭūsī. The 'three later Muḥammads' are seen as the driving force behind the revivification of *ḥadīth*-

related sciences in the 10th/16th century.

The existence of an *ijāza*, given by a scholar to a student, does not necessarily imply that the student actually attended his classes. Eligibility for an *ijāza* may have been based upon the student's performance in the *madrasa* setting, or upon a written piece of work submitted by the student for scrutiny by a particular scholar, or both. Sometimes an *ijāza* was procured through correspondance, as in the case of the *ijāza* issued to Muḥammad Bāqir by Nūr al-dīn 'Alī b. 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-'Āmilī (d.1068/1657-58), who lived in Mecca and could only have met Muḥammad Bāqir during the latter's trips there, if at all.[37] Thus even though we have a list of Muḥammad Bāqir's teachers, it is uncertain exactly how much and for how long he studied under each one; consequently the extent of their influence upon his mode of thought cannot be easily ascertained.

Apart from his father, Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī, Ḥurr al-'Amilī, Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and the aforementioned Ḥusaynī al-'Āmilī, the following are mentioned in **Fayḍ al-qudsī** as Muḥammad Bāqir's teachers:

- Mullā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d.1081/1670-71). He was Muḥammad Bāqir's brother-in-law. He wrote several treatises and commentaries on *ḥadīth* collections, the most important being a treatment of Kulaynī's **al-Kāfī** .[38]
- Ḥusayn 'Alī b.'Abdullāh al-Shūshtarī (d. 1069/1658-59). A *faqīh* of the Uṣūlī school, he narrated traditions on the authority of Shaykh Bahā'ī and also wrote treatises on *fiqh*.[39]
- Rafī' al-dīn Muḥammad al-Nā'īnī, also known as Mīrzā Rafī'ā (d.1080/1669-70

or 1099/1687-88). An eminent theologian and philosopher in the style of Fayḍ al-Kāshānī. He wrote treatises on the fundamentals of belief (*uṣūl al-'aqā'id*) and also wrote a philosophical work on the nature of existence.[40]

- Mīr Sharaf al-dīn 'Alī al-Shūlistānī al-Najafī (d.1065/1654-55). He lived in Mashhad, where he is buried. Also a teacher of Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, Najafī was an expert in *fiqh*, writing numerous treatises on legal matters such as regulations covering Friday prayer, the pilgrimage to Mecca etc.[41]

- 'Alīb. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Shahīdī al-Iṣfahānī (d.1104/1692-93). A descendant of Shahīd al-thānī, he wrote a commentary on **al-Kāfī** and penned, among other works, a short tract denouncing those who allowed the performance of music and singing. He also wrote an anti-Sufi treatise. His *ijāza* for Muḥammad Bāqir is dated 1068/1657-58.[42]

- Muḥammad Mu'min al-Astarābādī (d. 1088/1677-78). A resident of Mecca, where he was murdered by anti-Twelver elements. He was the son-in-law of the founder of the Akhbārī school, Mullā Muḥammad Amīn (d. 1033/1623-24). He wrote a treatise on *raj'a*, a subject about which Majlisī also wrote extensively.[43]

- Muḥammad b. Sharaf al-dīn Jazā'irī, known as Mīrzā Jazā'irī. He lived in Hyderabad. His *ijāza* for Muḥammad Bāqir was given in 1064/1653-54.[44]

- Qāḍī Amīr Ḥusayn. A *muḥaddith* upon whose authority Muḥammad Bāqir deemed the probably spurious **Fiqh al-Riḍā** to be authentic.[45]

- Ṣadr al-dīn 'Alī al-Shīrāzī al-Hindī (d.1120/1708-09). Like Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, al-

Hindī was both Muḥammad Bāqir's student and teacher.[46]

- Fayḍullāh b. Ghīyāth al-dīn Muḥammad al-Quhbā'ī. A *muḥaddith* who narrated on the authority of Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Karakī.[47]
- Muḥammad Muḥsin b. Muḥammad Mu'min al-Astarābādī (d. 1089/1678-79).[48]
- Abū al-Sharaf al-Iṣfahānī.[49]
- Mīr Muḥammad Qāsim al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī al-Quhbā'ī.[50]

One can discern a wide range of orientations — some of them theoretically conflicting — among the teachers of Muḥammad Bāqir, from the Sufi inclinations of Fayḍ al-Kāshānī and the vehemently anti-Sufi stance of Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī to the Akhbārī jurisprudence of Ḥurr al-ʻĀmilī and the Uṣūlī doctrines of al-Shūshtarī. Yet Muḥammad Bāqir was no syncretist, especially in the sense of combining *maʻqūl* with *manqūl* in the manner of his father or Shaykh Bahā'ī. In the same way, the idea that Muḥammad Bāqir held the middle ground between the Uṣūlī and Akhbārī extremes may on first reckoning be a sign that he was liberal enough in spirit to adopt freely from both doctrines, yet as ʻAllāma Burqaʻī says:

> There is no way in which one can claim to hold both Akhbārī and Uṣūlī positions at the same time. If one is said to occupy a middle position, maybe it is because he wants to spread any kind of narration without feeling the need to call its authenticity (*ṣiḥḥa*) into question, while at the same time retaining the right of the *mujtahid* to use reason and be imitated as a *muqallad*: these two positions are logically inconsistent and therefore cannot be held by one person at the same time.[51]

In his introduction to **Biḥār al-anwār**, Muḥammad Bāqir confirms that as a youth he was eager to learn all of the Islamic sciences and that he was able to do so. He says that:

> I stepped into the rose-garden of knowledge, saw both flowers and thorns, filled my arms with its fruits, sipped a mouthful from each of its streams, and obtained as much benefit as I could.[52]

In trying to think how he could best encourage others to attain such knowledge, Majlisī came gradually to realise that unless knowledge is taken from the 'leaders of religion (i.e the Imams) who are the intellects of mankind',[53] it will remain bittter to the taste. 'The Quran,' he declares, 'does not deem the intellects of men sufficient to read that book,' and emphasizes his belief that no-one is able to understand it save for the Prophet and the Imams, who were chosen by God and to whose household the revelation was sent.[54] It was after becoming aware of this point, he says, that:

> I left that which I had wasted so much of my life trying to acquire and learn — even though those subjects are very popular nowadays — and went in pursuit of something that I knew would be useful for me in the life to come, although there is not much call for the study of *ḥadīth* these days.[55]

It is not clear at exactly which point in his career Majlisī decided to abandon the study of *ma'qūl*. It is certain from his own admission that he had been

introduced to a wide range of rational sciences, and it is known from **Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'** that Majlisī even taught *ma'qūl* for a time. Tunukābunī relates how, one day, Majlisī was explaining the beliefs of the materialist Dahriyyūn when one of his students began to enthuse over these beliefs, asserting that the 'religion of the materialists is the true one.' Majlisī tried to refute his student but was unable to do so. Majlisī brought the class to an abrupt halt and vowed never again to teach philosophy or theology.[56] He also actively encouraged others from dabbling in the rational sciences. Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī, Majlisī's grandson and student, states that in his youth he was eager to study *ma'qūl* — philosophy in particular — but was persuaded by his grandfather during a trip to Mecca to abandon his ambition and concentrate instead on the study of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*.[57] Majlisī also ordered Ni'matullāh al-Jazā'irī not to complete a highly gnostic, theosophical work he had embarked upon entitled **Maqāmāt al-nijāt**, which comprised an analysis of the 'most beautiful names of God' (*asmā Allāh al-ḥusnā*) and their inner meanings.[58] Yusūfī's remarks about the inherent dislike of the rational sciences on the part of the 'hide-bound *'ulamā'*' are worth considering in the context of Majlisī's distaste for non-externalism:

> The hide-bound scholar recites a thousand and one traditions that cover ablutions and prayers, but question him on the meaning of God's throne (*'arsh*) or the intricacies of the Divine Decree and Determination (*qaḍā' wa qadar*) and he can but remain silent. 'Know the Imam,' he says, but how dare he? How can someone who rejects the Prophet's command, 'Know thyself and thou shalt know God, ' profess to know anyone else? And those from among the hide-bound *'ulamā'* who do

understand in theory the mysteries of God forbid their teaching because they know what will transpire in practice: one who truly knows God and serves only Him as his Master will have no need for 'Mr. Jurisprudent' (*āqā-i faqīh*) to act as intermediary between him and God, to consult the Quran (*istikhāra*) on his behalf, to collect his taxes (*khums wa zakāt*) and then squander them on the upkeep of yet more and more jurisprudents who will carry on the same devilish process...[59]

Majlisī's rejection of *ma'qūl* meant that he would concentrate his efforts almost exclusively on the propagation of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, the two central pillars of *manqūl*. It is certain that he understood the dangers inherent in inordinate attention to non-externalist pursuits: the abundance of Sufi sects in which *manqūl* is almost totally ignored has always prompted attacks from jurisprudent and theologian alike, and even many non-externalists have been quick to point out the folly of over-reliance on *'aql* as a basis for belief. The remedy, however, does not lie in forsaking one for the other: ideally, the three components of *ḥaqīqa*, *ṭarīqa* and *sharī'a* should all be present at the same time.[60] It is Majlisī's abandonment of *ma'qūl*, his denunciation of all non-externalist forms of Islamic expression, and his total involvement with externalism that have led critics such as Yusūfī, Arjomand and Sharī'atī to believe that he was propelled by personal ambition rather than a sincere desire to purify the Islamic message by emphasizing *manqūl* to the exclusion of everything else. The rapid rise to power of the externalist *fuqahā* in the latter years of the Safavid era, especially under the reigns of weak and inefficent rulers such as Shah Sulaymān (1666-93) and Sultan Ḥusayn (1694-1722), and their occupation of the majority of religious posts such as that of *shaykh al-islām* meant

that in order to progress as a religious professional one had to concentrate on the field which was the speciality of the majority. Both Shah Sulaymān and Sultan Ḥusayn favoured externalism and provided ample opportunity for the consolidation of the 'orthodoxy' by the Twelver *fuqahā'*. Whatever Majlisī's real intentions, the advent of these two rulers was highly appropriate for his cause.

4.4 The public career of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī

Majilisī's first public appointment was to the office of *imām jum'a* or Friday prayer leader of Isfahan. None of the sources mention a date for his accession to the office, although Karl-Heinz Pampus suggests that it must have been during the 1660s.[61] The most probable time woiuld have been shortly after Shah Sulaymān's coronation in 1077/1666. Tunukābunī claims that Shah 'Abbās II had wanted to make Muḥammad Bāqir Sabziwārī *qāḍī* of Isfahan but died before he could apoint him; when his son, Shah Sulaymān, came to power he chose to appoint Majlisī instead.[62] Tunukābunī's garbled account is clearly a mistake for there are no records of Majlisī ever having held the post of *qāḍī* . However, in **Zindigānī-i Majlisī** , S. Ṣafarī writes that Shah Sulaymān, who initially patronized non-externalists such as Sabziwārī and Āqā Ḥusayn Khwānsārī, approached Sabziwārī with a view to making him *imām jum'a* of Isfahan. Sabziwārī is said to have rejected him outright, whereupon a member of the Shah's court proposed that the ruler offer the position to Majlisī.[63] Around the same time, Majlisī had penned a treatise entitled **Raj'a** (The Return), in which he cited a tradition transmitted from Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq foretelling the rise of the Safavids from Gilan

and Azarbaijan as precursors of the return and rule of the Hidden Imam.[64] The tradition in question was later disputed by Mīr Lawḥī, a sworn enemy of the Majlisī family, and in all respects it would appear that Majlisī was attempting to ingratiate himself with the new ruler.[65]

Majlisī, who fully accepted the legality of Friday prayer in the absence of the Hidden Imam, was said to have set great store by the weekly congregational assembly. Apart from the Friday prayer, which he conducted in Isfahan's Masjid-i Shah, or royal mosque, he would also conduct communal worship during the month of Ramadan, especially during the three nights known as *iḥyā*, held to commemorate the martyrdom of 'Alī.[66] Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī in **Ḥadā'iq al-muqarribīn** states that 'thousands of believers' would flock to pray behind Majlisī and to hear his sermons which followed the Friday prayer ceremony. Khātūnābādī bemoans the fact that:

> Now, five years after (Majlisī's) death, no-one gathers in congregational worship as they did during his lifetime. The mosques, which were once filled with the sweet sound of his edifying sermons and fruitful advice, are now empty. When he was alive he would advise people on what they should and should not do, in such a lucid and simple way that everyone could understand. But now no-one knows what to do...[67]

Majlisī's popularity apparently had a great effect on Shah Sulaymān, who, as his reign progressed, grew less and less enamoured of the non-externalists and gravitated increasingly towards the simplistic, uncomplicated externalism of Majlisī and his like. Shah Sulaymān allowed himself to be courted by the externalists

and was known to treat them with great generosity. Majlisī curried favour publicly with the Shah, to the point of reprimanding fellow scholars for impropriety in the Shah's presence.[68] For his part, Majlisī openly supported the monarchy and, as Said Arjomand has pointed out, supplied a clear legitimization of kingship that had hitherto been absent from the official Twelver Shi'ite political ethos. In his **'Ayn al-ḥayāt**, in the section entitled 'On the Rights of Kings, Obedience to them, Praying for their Moral Uprightness, and not questioning their Majesty,' Majlisī writes:

> Know that the Kings of the True Religion (*dīn-i ḥaqq*) have many rights on their subjects, since they protect them and repel the enemies of religion from them: their religion, life, property and honour are secure because of the protection of kings. Therefore the subjects must pray for the kings and recognise their rights.[69]

Majlisī affirms that even if kings are tyrannical and unjust, one must obey them and pray that they might improve. Disobedience to them, he declares, brings affliction (*balā*), and to attract *balā* is forbidden according to the dictates of *taqiyya* .[70] Majlisī thus sanctioned the principles of legitimacy of the temporal rule of kings, but did not go so far as to endorse the rights of kings to religious rule: this would have undermined drastically the position of the *fuqahā'* as the supreme source of religious authority and left them in a position of total subservience to the monarchy. The political ethos of the Twelver Shi'ite externalists will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V in the section on *intiẓār*.

Majlisī's unwavering support and loyalty led Shah Sulaymān to appoint him as *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan in 1098/1687. In **Waqāi' al-sinīn** the aforementioned Khātūnābādī writes:

> On the 4th of Jumāda al-awwal 1098, his most High and Exalted Majesty, Shah Sulaymān Ṣafawī, out of the insistence that he nurtured in his heart that the holy laws of Islam be spread throughout the land, appointed Mawlānā Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī to the post of *shaykh al-islām* to the royal court at Isfahan; and, out of respect for the *'ulamā'* and in order to gain their pleasure, actually allowed the words ' I beseech thee' to fall from his exalted tongue.[71]

As Khātūnābādī points out, the appointment of Majlisī to the office of *shaykh al-islām* at the age of 61 gave him unrivalled power as the chief religious dignitary of the realm. His first task was to endeavour to 'promote the knowledge (*'ilm*) and *ḥadīth* of the Shi'ites, to protect the *'ulamā'* and the defenceless people, to enjoin the good (*amr bi'l ma'rūf*) and prohibit the forbidden (*nahy 'an al-munkar*), to curb the opponents of Islam, and to eradicate the oppression (*ẓulm*) and despotism (*zūrgū'ī*) of the past, which non-one else had been able to stop.' [72] One of Majlisī's first acts was to destroy the idols of a Hindu temple that had been set up by Indian merchants resident in the capital. The Hindus apparently tried to bribe the Shah with large amounts of money in order to prevent the destruction of their place of worship, but: 'The Shah and his courtiers always went out of their way to co-operate with him (i.e. Majlisī) and never tried to prevent him from carrying out his religious duties.' [73] The idols were duly smashed and the

heartbroken Hindu keeper of the temple consequently committed suicide.[74]

Majlisī also pursued a vigorous anti-Sunnite and anti-Sufi policy, converting minorites wherever possible to the Twelver Shi'ite creed. The sources indicate that as many as 70,000 non-Twelvers were converted by Majilisī; apparently they accepted Twelver Shi'ism without duress, merely by reading Majlisī's works.[75] Twelver Shi'ite missionaries were sent to areas where non-Twelver minorities still existed, particularly in Afghanistan;[76] the anti-Sunnite repression that intensified under Majlisī's spell as *shaykh al-islām* has been seen by some as an important cause of the disaffection of the Sunnite populace of Afghanistan, which led to the Afghan invasion and the eventual overthrow of the Safavid dynasty.

Majlisī's term as *shaykh al-islām* continued into the reign of Sultan Ḥusayn (1694-1722), whom Majlisī crowned as Shah. Sultan Ḥusayn was a lily-livered, outwardly pious individual over whom Majlisī is said to have exerted great influence. Upon the new Shah's accession, Majlisī asked for three decrees to be passed: wine-drinking was to be abolished; faction-fighting was to be outlawed; and the sport of pigeon-racing was to be made illegal. Only the fate of the *farmān* prohibiting wine is known: thousands of bottles of wine from the royal cellars were smashed. The enforcement of the decree was short-lived, however, since those at court and in the royal family were loathe to abandon their addiction to alcohol. Measures against the use of tobacco were also taken. Majlisī also obtained a decree for the expulsion of Sufis from the capital, which was rigidly enforced.[77]

In the **Tadhkirat al-mulūk** (Memorial for Kings), a manual of Safavid

adminstration completed about 1726, the anonymous author begins by describing the office of *mullā-bāshī* as the most important religious office in the realm. The *mullābāshī* was:

> ... the head of all the mullas ... (he) had a definite place near the throne, none of the scholars and sayyids sitting nearer than he in the King's presence. [The mullā-bāshī] did not interfere in any affairs except by soliciting pensions for students and men of merit, by removing oppression from the oppressed, by interceding for the guilty, by investigating the problems of the Sacred Law and by giving consultations in law-suits and [other] affairs [ruled by] the Sharī'at.[78]

As the author points out, the office of *mullā-bāshī* did not exist during the reigns of the previous Safavid rulers, although at any one time there was always one scholar — generally accepted as the most learned — who carried out functions more or less identical to the ones mentioned above. For example, as *shaykh al-islām* of Isfahan, Majlisī in effect became *mullābāshī* before the actual creation of the title.

According to the **Tadhkirat al-mulūk**, the post of *mullābāshī* was inaugurated towards the end of the reign of Sultan Ḥusayn; its first incumbent was one Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir who, the author notes, 'fell short of his contemporary Āqā Jamāl' in learning.[79] The aforementioned Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir, the text continues, also founded the famous Chahār Bāgh *madrasa* in Isfahan and became its first rector. Vladimir Minorsky, the translator and editor of **Tadhkirat al-mulūk** identifies the first incumbent of the office of *mullā-bāshī* , i.e. Mīr Muḥammad

Bāqir, as none other than Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, and goes on to note the 'strange dislike of the author for ... Majlisī, the all-powerful restorer of the Shi'a orthodoxy.' [80] However there are several points which prove that Minorsky was wrong. First and foremost, Majlisī died in 1111/1699-1700, only a few years into the reign of Sultan Ḥusayn, whereas the **Tadhkirat al-mulūk** states that the office of *mullā-bāshī* was conferred on Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir towards the end of Sultan Ḥusayn's reign. Secondly, Khātūnābādī states that the Chahār Bāgh *madrasa* was inaugurated in 1122/1710-11, over a decade after Majlisī's death, and that its rector for life to whom the **Tadhkirat al-mulūk** refers is not Majlisī but Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnābādī (d. 1127/1715). The inscription on the tombstone of the latter clearly identifies him as the first rector of the Chahār Bāgh *madrasa*, the tutor of Sultan Ḥusayn, and the *mullā-bāshī*.[81] Furthermore, the appellation '*mīr*' was given only to *sayyids* — and nowhere in the sources is Majlisī accredited with this title. The **Waqāi' al-sinīn** establishes 1124/1712-13 as the year in which the office of *mullā-bāshī* was created;[82] the fact that Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī could not have been the first incumbent of the new office is further confirmed by Dānishpazhūh in his **Fihrist**.[83]

Thus it becomes clear that Majlisī never held the title of *mullā-bāshī*, although he did carry out almost identical functions while *shaykh al-islām* during the reigns of Shah Sulaymān and Sultan Ḥusayn.

4.5 Majlisī's written works

Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī was by far the most prolific author of the Safavid

period. **Fayḍ al-qudsī** lists 13 Arabic titles and 53 Persian works which are undoubtedly from the Majlisī pen, although when one considers that many of these works each runs to several volumes — the modern edition of **Biḥār al-anwār** alone covers over a hundred — then it is clear that the size of his output is meaningless in terms of the number of titles. The 66 works listed in **Fayḍ al-qudsī** contain a total of 1,402,700 *bayt*. Divided by 73, the number of Majlisī's years, this comes to 19,215 lines per year or 53 a day; if we calculate for his period of maturity, say, 58 years, then the annnual amount is 24,170 or 67 lines per day.[84] Tunukābunī claims that Majlisī wrote at least 1000 lines a day, a gross exaggeration but typical of externalist hagiography and of the attitude that the vaster the output, the greater the writer.[85]

Majlisī's works — the **Biḥār** will be discussed seperately later on — are overwhelmingly externalist in content, the vast majority being centred on the lives, miracles and deaths of the Imams and on the myriad rules and regulations that cover the practical, everyday life of the Twelver Shi'ite believer. Works on *ma'rifat al-nafs* or *ma'rifat Allāh* are conspicuous by their absence.

In the writings of Majlisī, the Imams as historical figures and their lives and sayings had come to the foreground of religious discussion and practice, and the codification of religious ritual as carried out by Majlisī in his works draws almost exclusively on the purported sayings of the Imams. In **Ḥilyat al-muttaqīn**, for instance, Majlisī brings together various narrations from the Imams concerning the everyday activities and personal etiquette proper for a believer: in which manner

he should dress, how he should eat, take ablutions, cut his nails, urinate etc.; the prayers he should recite on entering the bathroom, the verses he should repeat when blowing his nose — in short, everything pertinent to the minutest personal acts, and all supposedly on the authority of the Imams.[86]

Zād al-ma'ād is another collection of traditions which deals at great length with the rites that are to be observed throughout the year: prayers on the occasion of the birth and death dates of the Imams, litanies to be read on certain anniversaries and festivals, etc.[87]

Tuḥfat al-zā'ir is a pilgrimage manual containing information on the etiquette to be observed when visiting the Twelver Shi'ite holy places, namely the tombs of the Imams and their descendants, and the prayers and invocations to be offered there.[88] *A propos* the visiting of Twelver shrines, Said Arjomand has pointed out the fact that in the writings of Majlisī, the importance of pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca has been played down in favour of *ziyāra*, or pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams.[89] The *ḥajj* stresses the universality of the Muslim community, and the rites performed there have also been interpreted by certain writers as being emblematic of the carnal soul's repentance from self-worship and of the journey to God.[90] The practice of *ziyāra*, however, tends to foster the cult of the Imam as saviour and intercessor, and by doing so further externalizes belief by shifting the emphasis from the theocentrism of the *ḥajj* to the imamocentrism of *ziyāra*. Pilgrimage to the shrines was given relatively little importance by the early Twelver scholars, yet Majlisī saw to it that *ziyāra* became an important part of

Twelver doctrine. Pamphlets containing special prayers to be read at the different shrines (*ziyārat-nāma*) proliferated.

Majlisī wrote several treatises on the correct way of performing the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), on the payment of *zakāt* and on the rules of fasting. Such works of jurisprudence were the stock-in-trade of the externalists. Superogatory prayers (*du'ā*), especially those handed down in connection with the Imams, are also given great importance by Majilsī. Although the original meaning of the word *du'ā* is to call on God through the Divine names, for the externalist the purpose of *du'ā* is the granting of personal wishes and worldly needs, many of which are directed and expressed through the personae of the Imams. In **Zād al-ma'ād**, for instance, there are numerous examples of the benefits to be gained in this world for superogatory prayers for curing stuttering, aches and pains, avoiding abortion, finding lost objects etc.[91] In **Munājātnāma**, Majlisī puts forward the theory that each day is split up into twelve 2-hour sections, each one of which is 'governed' by one of the Imams. Whenever one prays, one is to direct the prayer through the particular Imam responsible for the hour in which the prayer is offered.[92] Many of Majlisī's Persian works comprise Persian translations from Arabic of superogatory prayers attributed to the Imams, such as **Du'ā-i Kumayl** and **Zīyārat al-jāmi'a**, a prayer to be read when visiting any of the tombs of the Imams.[93]

Majlisī's reliance on the scriptural rather than the rational, on the externalia rather than the fundamentals, is thrown even more sharply into focus when one contrasts his approach with that of the early, pre-Safavid Twelver Shi'ite scholars,

who, if not internalists, were at least prepared to give the question of belief the importance which, as the cornerstone of Islam, it duly warrants. Said Arjomand, while failing to grasp the important connotations that the issue evokes, has highlighted Majlisī's blatant over-externalization of the faith by contrasting his **Ḥaqq al-yaqīn** with Kulaynī's **al-Kāfī** and 'Allāma Ḥillī's **Bāb al-ḥādī 'ashara**, a work which represents the climax of the systematization of Twelver Shi'ite theology two centuries before the Safavids.[94]

Ḥaqq al-yaqīn is dated 1109/1697-98, one year before Majlisī's death, and is thus probably his last work. It is also undoubtedly one of his most popular pieces of writing. Āqā Muḥammad Kirmānshāhī, writing in 1219/1804-05, says:

> The writings of (Majlisī) are so popular and so famous that there is no place, be it in the lands of Islam or the lands of the infidels, that is without one of his works. I heard from some trustworthy people that long ago, a ship that was travelling the ocean hit a storm, and the travellers on the ship, after much trouble and despair, reached a far-off island where nothing of Islam had ever been heard. The travellers were taken in as the guests of a man on that island, who, incredibly, turned out to be a Muslim. The travellers asked how it was that he, on an island full of infidels, with no traces of Islam, had come to be Muslim. The man opened a cupboard and brought out a book: it was 'Allāma Majlisī's **Ḥaqq al-yaqīn**. The man said: "My tribe and I embraced Islam thanks to the bounty and guidance of this book." [95]

Ḥaqq al-yaqīn is Majlisī's authoritative and comprehensive statement in Persian of the Twelver Shi'ite creed. Ostensibly it concerns *uṣūl al-dīn*, but in actual fact is given over largely to blow-by-blow accounts of the terrors of hell-

fire, plus the ritual vilification of the first three Caliphs. In **Ḥaqq al-yaqīn**, by contrast to **al-Kāfī** , the virtues of knowledge (*faḍīlat al-ʿilm*) and the difference between reason and ignorance receive no attention whatsoever, while *īmān* and *kufr* (belief and unbelief) are discussed perfunctorily towards the end. The section on God and His attributes, names and acts is extremely brief, this being in sharp contrast with the attention this very pivotal question receives in Ḥillī's **Bāb al-ḥādī ʿashara**. In the latter, the question of Divine justice (*ʿadl*) is central, with Ḥillī discussing how the will of God functions in the cosmos and how it is compatible with human free-will. It is largely, Ḥilli points out, upon the idea of Divine justice that the explanation of prophethood, the *imāma* and the Resurrection depends. **Ḥaqq al-yaqīn**, however, includes no mention of the question of Divine justice. Prophecy, too, is dealt with superficially, and then only in the context of the Prophet's miracles. The bulk of the book is taken up with the denigration of the first three Caliphs (approximately 125 pages) and the resurrection, details of which are described over 170 pages in the minutest detail.[96] Philosophical and rational proofs for the existence and necesity of Resurrection are eschewed; one is told that belief is incumbent, but not why one should believe or how. The whole question of the significance of the Resurrection and the Hereafter for the personal life of the individual in this world is passed over: *īmān* is either seen to be lacking or is taken for granted, and any advice on how it might be acquired, sustained or increased is not given, and the whole area of internalism that is germane to the question of resurrection and man's ultimate fate is completely ignored.

The fact that Majlisī wrote much of his work in Persian made it possible

for his massive output to reach the masses, whose imagination and loyalty he was able to capture. His simplistic and rigidly dogmatic statements of what he saw as the tenets of the Twelver Shi'ite creed were much more digestible for the masses than the teachings of the philosophers. As Browne says in his **Literary History of Persia**:

> The great achievements of the Shi'a doctors of the later Safawi period, such as the Majlisīs, was their popularization of the Shi'a doctrine and the historical *Anschauung* in the vernacular. They realized that to reach the people they must employ the language of the people — in a simple form — and they reaped their reward in the intense and widespread enthusiasm for the Shi'a cause which they succeeded in creating.[97]

4.6 Majlisī's Biḥār al-anwār

The teachings of the Twelve Imams — their sayings and practices — were, like those of the Prophet, committed to paper at a very early stage by their companions and contemporaries, who transmitted traditions from their leaders either directly or through others who claimed to have heard their words. The great majority of Twelver Shi'ite traditions are attributed to the 5th and 6th Imams, Muḥammad Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Groups of traditions were collected into seperate works known as *'aṣl* (principle or source), each written by a contemporary of an Imam; in all, some 400 of these works were written and enjoyed steady circulation among Twelver Shi'ite scholars during the lifetime of the later Imams and throughout the so-called 'lesser occultation.' The 400 'sources' were later en-

capsulated — albeit not in their entirety — into more comprehensive and scholarly collections, most notably the four canonical books of the Twelver Shi'ite creed that were mentioned in Chapter III. The narrations taken from the 400 *uṣūl* appear in a much more orderly fashion in these later works, and most of them are arranged loosely according to subject matter. It is thanks to these works that we can gain insight into the political, social and religious ideas and currents prevalent among the early Twelver Shi'ite communities.

Many of the 400 *uṣūl* — and it is not known how many copies, if any, of each one were in circulation — were gradually lost or hidden away in private libraries. Majlisī deplored the fact these important sources had been forgotten as a result, he says, of 'the dominance of kings and rulers opposed to Shi'ism, and leaders who had gone astray; or because of the propagation of worthless sciences by ignoramuses who feign excellence and intellectual perfection, or because the *'ulamā'* had not paid proper attention to them in the past.' [98] The narrations of the family of 'Alī, he argues, are more comprehensive and of greater value than any other sciences or branches of knowledge. Consequently, Majlisī decided to gather together as many of the *uṣūl* as he could, searching far and wide and appealing for help to anyone who may have had anything of worth in his possession. Friends and students were despatched to all corners of the realm, and even overseas, to scout for books and manuscripts; material was sought from places as distant as Yemen.[99] In time, Majlisī was able to gather some 200 of the *uṣūl* and embark upon a project that was to last more than thirty years, yielding, finally, his *magnum opus*: the vast, encyclopaedic collection of Twelver Shi'ite traditions entitled **Biḥār al-anwār**

(Oceans of Light).

The *uṣūl* which Majlisī was able to collect were for the most part in disarray. Majlisī himself complains that the traditions were not arranged according to subject, and that their general disorder may have been one of the reasons for their falling into disuse. Majlisī says that he made *istikhāra* and asked for God's help and then began to work, endeavouring to record all of the traditions scattered throughout the *uṣūl* in one place, under proper subject headings. Each chapter was begun with verses from the Quran which correspond to the title of the chapter, and comments of various exegetes relating to those verses were added wherever necessary. Majlisī's own explanations are of two kinds: those concerning language and etymology, which he begins with the heading '*mu'allif* (author); and those which actually offer an interpretation of the traditions themselves.

The compilation of the **Biḥār al-anwār**, which was begun in 1077/1666-67 and was never completed, was not a task that Majlisī was engaged in alone. Tunukābunī mentions that Mullā 'Abdullāh Shūshtarī, a student of Majlisī who spent much of his time with his teacher in the latter's library in Isfahan, corrected or helped to correct many of the original 26 volumes of the **Biḥār**; Shaykh Jazā'irī, another of Majlisī's students, and Āmina Bigum, Majlisī's sister, are also known to have contributed to the work.[100] Many other of Majlisī's students were also said to have been directed by their teacher to extract from the *uṣūl* traditions concerning a certain subject and then to write them on a piece of paper, leaving enough room for Majlisī to make any comments should he deem it necessary.[101] The fact that

many traditions appear without comment or criticism suggests that Majlisī did not do the lion's share of the work, let alone all of it as his hagiographers would lead one to believe. 'Alī Dawānī, for instance, berates those who claim that Majlisī was helped in the compilation of the **Biḥār** and states that it is clearly all his own work, but then goes on to contradict himself by saying, quite justifiably, that help from others in writing such a momentous piece of work would not detract from the greatness of the author.[102] There is, however, little in the **Biḥār** that can be called original, unless it be the scattered comments of Majlisī himself.

Tunukābunī, in **Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'**, objects to one scholar calling Majlisī a *muḥaddith*, a term which, he says, denotes nothing more than a mere scribe.[103] The **Biḥār** is, however, for the most part simply a collection of traditions, many of them obscure and of doubtful authenticity, the compilation of which Majlisī may be said to have supervised and, on occasions, checked and commented upon. In this light, a more apt term to describe Majlisīwould be *mudawwin* or compiler, or at best *muṣaḥḥiḥ* or editor. Even the term *muḥaddith*, which Tunukābunī objects to so vehemently, would be unsuitable considering that the term implies some kind of rigid and systematic process of selection of traditions on the basis of authenticity. There is no indication, however, of whether any particular tradition is genuine or not; Majlisī himself offers no explanation. In this context 'Alī Dawānī says that the **Biḥār** is like an ocean in which both pearls and slime may be found.[104] An uncritical acceptance of any narrations which happened to come his way has led to Majlisī's critics accusing him of opportunism and forgery. Indeed it would have been more scholarly of Majlisī to establish the authenticity of the traditions and

then comment upon them rather than include dubious narrations and leave them without comment. In this context the dictum of Ibn al-Jawzī immediately springs to mind:

> Among the ways wherein the devil deludes the Traditionists is the reporting of spurious traditions without stating that they are spurious.[105]

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that unreliable traditions from earlier sources could have been systematically weeded out and a collection of sound narrations, based on the scattered *uṣūl* and perhaps on par with the four canonical works of Kulaynī *et al* produced. As it now stands, the **Biḥār** is a *mélange* of anything and everything, the sound and the weak all grouped together indiscriminately. What is more likely to raise suspicions against Majlisī is the fact that certain obvious fabrications are dwelt upon by him at great length and treated as sound. Elsewhere they are mentioned without comment and the reader is left to make his own interpretation. Yet despite this, and despite the fact that the work was penned in Arabic, the **Biḥār** fired the interest of the *fuqahā'* and, when translated, the people themselves. Most of the volumes of the **Biḥār** have been translated into Persian, some more than once, and Urdu versions also exist. Volume XIII, which deals with the Hidden Imam, has been translated by four different people, and a measure of its popularity may be seen in the fact that the most recent of these translations, by 'Alī Dawānī in the early 1960s, has run to over sixteen editions in Iran.[106]

4.7 Majlisī *vis-a-vis* Sufism and other 'innovations'

The rise to prominence of the externalist *fuqahā'* in the roles of *mujtahid*, *shaykh al-islām*, scholar and prayer-leader in the latter part of the Safavid era was coupled with, and, for the most part, facilitated by, sustained attacks by the externalists on all other forms of religious orientaton which they perceived to be antithetical to their own. The *'aqlī* sciences such as philosophy, theology and *ḥikma* and their respective spokesmen and exponents invariably came under attack, but it was against Sufism and its adherents that the *fuqahā'* conducted their most passionate and vociferous opposition. Such rigorism was not characteristic of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā* alone, although their zeal was unquestionably matchless.

Throughout the history of Islam, the denunciation of any practice even remotely suggestive of deviation from the Quran and the *sunna* has been commonplace in the writings and preachings of Muslim scholars, not least in the case of Sufism. Because of the flexibility of the term Sufism — the fact that it is used to denote a wide spectrum of outlooks and practices — it often happened that certain Sufis themselves would castigate others for lack of propriety with respect to the dictates of the Quran and *sunna*. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, for example, remonstrated with one of his followers over an act that was not strictly in accord with the *sharī'a*, while Junayd al-Baghdādī asserted that all Sufi knowledge 'is derived strictly from the Book and the *sunna*; so he who has not recited the Quran and written the *ḥadīth* has no right to talk about our knowledge.' [107] Generally speaking it has been 'popular' Sufism — the cult of the wandering dervishes or Qalandars — that

has borne the brunt of the attacks, while 'high' Sufism, or, more correctly, Islamic gnosticism and theocentric internalism, has been more or less tolerated. Mullā Ṣadrā, himself an internalist who was to fall foul of the orthodoxy, also condemned popular Sufism in the strongest terms.[108]

The Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* of the late Safavid period wasted no time in waging an all out crusade against Sufis of all types and persuasions, and numerous treatises were written to refute their beliefs. Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī, Majlisī's teacher and *shaykh al-islām* of Qumm, was particularly vociferous. During the reign of Shah 'Abbās II he had fulminated against his opponents, among them Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī and Mullā Khalīl Qazwīnī, both of whom were favoured by the ruler. Qummī stated that the doctrine of the Sufis and philosophers was contrary to the religion of Islam and the teachings of the Quran.[109] Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, the *shaykh al-islām* of Mashhad, produced 1000 traditions that he claimed were transmitted in refutation of the Sufis.[110] Ni'matullāh Jazā'irī (d.1112/1700-01) attacked the late Shaykh Bahā'ī for his association with the 'heretics, Sufis and those who believe in the doctrine of divine love.' [111]

Unlike Qummī, Majlisī never devoted an entire work to the refutation of what he termed 'this foul and hellish growth',[112] although his anti-Sufi sentiments run thread-like through his major works. However, the importance that he attached to the refutation of Sufism may be gauged from the fact that a whole section of his treatise entitled **I'tiqādāt**, written in one night during a trip to Mashhad at the request of an unnamed person, is devoted to this matter. Effec-

tively, therefore, an explicit refutation of all Sufi-inspired ideas is presented as a fundamental of belief, albeit by implication.

Majlisī's attacks are levelled mainly at the obviously questionable — from the orthodox viewpoint — practices of popular Sufism prevalent among the dervish orders (but not confined to them) such as singing and dancing (*samā'*), group invocation and recitation (*dhikr-i jallī*), abstention from meat (*tark-i ḥaywānī*), laxity in the observance of *sharī'a* regulations, seclusion from society (*gūsha-gīrī*), and so on. Abstention from meat is not allowed since it leads to bodily and mental weakness; little wonder, he argues, that the Sufis talk such nonsense, given the fact that they shut themselves away in their caves or cloisters for forty days and nights without meat.[113]

The Sufis' ritualized withdrawal from the world and everyday occupations, usually for forty days and nights at a time (*chilla-nishīnī*), is condemned since any kind of *gūsha-gīrī* brings about indifference to the essentials (*wājibāt*) of belief, among which Majlisī enumerates: social contact with other Muslims; guiding others and advising them as to their religious duties (*amr wa nahy*); teaching others the rules and regulations of religion (*dīn*); visiting the sick; attending funerals; meeting the material and spiritual needs of others; and enforcing the laws of Islam on the social level. Majlisī does not discuss the fact that solitary retreat was a renowned practice of Muḥammad, the Imams and most of the prophets mentioned in the Quran.

The practices of *dhikr-i khafī* and *dhikr-i jallī* , says Majlisī, have no scrip-

tural basis whatsoever and thus constitute an innovation (*bid'a*). All innovations, Majlisī asserts, are forms of misguidance, and misguidance leads to hellfire. Not content with such heresies, the Sufis have also contrived to change the very fundamentals of belief; Majlisī vehemently attacks the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and accuses the Sufis of believing in coercive predetermination (*jabr*) and the abrogation of acts of worship (*suqūṭ-i 'ibādat*). In **I'tiqādāt** he warns his own brother believers to 'protect your religion and faith from the deceptions of these devils and charlatans, and steer clear of their tricks which are designed to fool the ignorant masses.' [114] Apart from such abominations, how, asks Majlisī, will the followers of these people account for their allegiance to them on the day of reckoning? How can one follow the likes of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who has been cursed in various traditions? How could one follow Sufyān al-Thawrī, who was an enemy of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq? Or Ghazālī, who was clearly a *nāṣibī*, claiming *imāma* in the same way that 'Alī was Imam and declaring that whoever curses Yazīd is a sinner? How could one follow Ghazālī's accursed brother, Aḥmad, who wrote that Satan is one of God's closest and most favoured creatures? Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī, whose **Mathnawī** was and still is referred to in Iran as the 'Persian Quran', is singled out by Majlisī on account of his statement that Ibn Muljam, the killer of 'Alī, will intercede for the Imam on the day of judgement. Majlisī also attacks Rūmī's famous line, 'colourlessness fell prey to colour', and declares that belief in *jabr*, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the abrogation of ritual worship permeates every page of Rūmī's writings.[115] Ibn al-'Arabī also comes under attack for his theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and also the fact that he claimed to have ascended to heaven (*mi'rāj*) and seen that Imam 'Alī's place there

was lower than that of the first three Caliphs. Finally, Majlisī castigates all Sufis for 'claiming to know the secrets of the cosmos but remaining ignorant of what is *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* or how inheritance is distributed, and so on.' [116]

The practices of popular Sufism were clearly suspect to both the legalist *fuqahā'* and, indeed, to the exponents of 'high' Sufism and gnosticism themselves, and Majlisī is able to offer reasonable criticism when refuting them. The question of the 'high Sufis' — the Rūmīs and the Ghazālīs — is a much thornier one, and the ambiguity of many of their concepts made it extremely difficult for the externalist *fuqahā'* to find fault on strictly religious grounds. Even an extreme case such as that of Ḥallāj's ecstatic outburst '*Anā al-ḥaqq*' (I am the Truth) and '*Anā Allāh*' (I am God) were, according to one (Sunnite) *faqīh*, open to interpretation: they are so ambiguous that they could have been uttered as much in pure sincerity as in associationism (*shirk*) and heresy.[117] Majlisī never goes into detail when outlining his ciriticisms of the 'high' Sufis as regards their fundamental beliefs: instead he directs his attacks against the apparent anti-Shi'ite and anti-*sharī'a* remarks of his opponents.

Apart from purely religious considerations it was necessary for the externalists to battle with and uproot Sufism in all its forms. The non-externalists — especially the 'high' Sufis — were dangerous for the simple reason that they placed *īmān* and *ma'rifa* above everything else and saw no special place of honour in the Islamic community for the *faqīh*, whose sole responsibility was to advise on matters of jurisprudence. The contempt that Mullā Sadrā held for those *fuqahā*

who overstepped this mark has already been noted. Popular Sufism was even more problematic given the support it obviously had from the illiterate Muslim masses: as already noted, many Sufi adherents were expelled from Isfahan on Majlisī's orders.[118] Majlisī tackled the problem by tarring both popular and orthodox Sufism with the same brush, accusing all of those under the Sufi banner with heterodoxy, innovation (*bid'a*) and unbelief. All Sufis — and thus all who pay what must have seemed to Majlisī to be inordinate attention to the inner realities of belief — were thus held to be *kāfir* and deserving of hellfire. It is this indiscriminate lumping together of all those scholars and thinkers whose particular ideological leanings did not tally with his own that casts serious doubt on Majlisī's motives; for the dismissal and denigration of philosophy, *ḥikma* and Sufism could only have served to secure the monopoly of the externalist *fuqahā'* on the religious allegiance of the masses. So determined was he to eradicate all traces of non-externalist sympathy, and so aware was he of the dangers inherent in being even remotely connected with Sufism that he took great pains to exonerate his own father of the accusations levelled against him:

> God forbid that you think my father was a Sufi! He was acquainted with the sayings of the Imams, and such a person cannot be a Sufi. He was a man of great piety, and initially he would call his piety Sufism in order to win the trust of the Sufis and thus be able to influence them and prevent them from uttering inanities and committing vile acts. In this way he was able to guide many of them. At the end of his life, when he saw that there was no hope and that (the Sufis) are the enemies of God and in a position of dominance over the masses, he revealed his hatred for them. I know my father's methods and policies better than anyone, and the writings

he penned concerning this matter are with me...[119]

Majlisī's unqualified denunciation of all forms of non-externalism becomes even more open to question when one considers that someone like Ibn Taymīyya, who spent most of his life struggling against non-orthodox Islam, displayed remarkable regard for early ascetics such as Junayd and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī for the simple reason that they recognised in the unremitting following of the Quran and the *sunna* 'the foundation of all mystical experience.' [120] Essentially an externalist, Ibn Taymīyya actually found Sufi ideals very beautiful and saw them as a source of spiritual and intellectual satisfaction. The problem as he saw it lay in the excesses committed in the name of Sufism. Furthermore, he inveighed against anything that constituted an innovation; Majlisī, on the other hand, condemned the Sufis as heretics and innovators, yet himself turned a blind eye to — and in some cases actively encouraged — many innovations propagated in the name of Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy. Also, while denigrating the non-externalists on account of their supposed heresies he administered to the spiritual needs of two weak and ineffective rulers and their courtiers whose vice and debauchery knew no bounds but which was tolerated by Majlisī without hardly a murmur of protest.

4.8 Majlisī and his interpretation of the word *'ilm*

Majlisī's interpretation of the words *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* is of fundamental importance if one is to understand not only his personal position but also the ideological basis of the group of scholars which rose to prominence at the end of

the Safavid era. For Majlisī, the word *'ilm* implies knowledge of the scriptural sciences, in particular of the transmission and interpretation of traditions ascribed to the Prophet and the Imams:

> And the knowledge implied in ('Alī's) words, 'Knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim' is the knowledge of God's commands, of prayer and *zakāt* and fasting; and the repositories of this knowledge are the Holy Imams and those whom they have designated as successors from among the *muḥaddithūn* and the *fuqahā*.[121]

Consequently, an *'ālim* is one who has studied and mastered *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. As explained in Chapter III, externalism — the study of the *furū' al-dīn* — concerns for the most part the rules and rites which pertain to the outward show of submission that is Islam. Knowledge of these rules and rites consists of a detailed understanding of traditions, Quranic commentary, the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and Arabic. Anyone who gains such knowledge can, according to Majlisī, be called an *'ālim*. Since the prerequisites of externalist knowledge do not include *īmān* — the degree of which, being in no way determined by judgement of externals, is impossible to gauge — then it is theoretically possible for an individual who has no sound belief in the fundamentals of Islam to become an *'ālim* in the popular sense of the word; indeed it is these pseudo-*'ulamā'* that Ghazālī and Mullā Ṣadrā berate in their treatises aimed aginst the externalist *fuqahā'*.

The Quran exalts ' those who know ' (*'ulamā'*) by saying that it is only they who fear God. It is clear that the knowledge implied in the Quranic verse is

not the knowledge of externalia such as is transmitted through *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. If, as Majlisī states, the term *'ilm* refers to the knowledge of *ḥadīth*, then one must conclude that the most fearful of God's slaves are those who are acquainted with the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams. As a corollary, the externalist *fuqahā'* are the most fearful of God's slaves: Majlisī and those who follow his line of thinking are thus elevated to a position of veneration in the Twelver Shi'ite community second only to the Prophet and the Imams themselves. The famous tradition which states that ' the *'ulamā'* are the inheritors of the prophets ' conveniently confirms this. Thus in the eyes of the undiscerning masses, the *'ulamā'* — i.e. the *fuqahā'* — become above all suspicion as far as belief and sincerity are concerned: if they are the inheritors of the prophet, and the true interpreters of his words, how indeed are they to be doubted? It is thus that the religious base of the *'ulamā'* among the people is firmly cemented, for it is inconceivable for a simple believer to doubt the credibility of a *faqīh* or a *muḥaddith* or *mufassir*, for such a person — at least in the eyes of the undiscerning — **must** be a believer since he is an *'ālim*. The respect and reverence in which the *'ulamā'* are held by the Muslim masses must be understood in the context of the assumption — conscious or otherwise — that the possessor of *'ilm* is also the possessor of *īmān*.

The Twelver Shi'ite externalist *fuqahā'* have always been seen as charismatic individuals by their followers; the *fuqahā'* of the Safavid period, with Majlisī at the helm, re-interpreted *'ilm* in such a way that it became coterminous with *fiqh* and thus enabled their position as charismatic leaders of the community to become enshrined in the tenets of the new orthodoxy. Numerous *karāmāt*, or

saintly miracles, came to be attributed to the *fuqahā'*: the biographies included in books such as **Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā'** are replete with accounts of their miraculous deeds and dreams.[122] The *fuqahā'* were experts in jurisprudence and the masses, who were for the most part illiterate, were forced to refer to them for guidance on matters of *fiqh*; however, with the renewed emphasis on the charismatic quality of the *fuqahā'/ 'ulamā'*, the Twelver masses came to see them not only as a means and point of recourse in secondary matters but also as intermediaries in matters of belief. The *'ulamā'* were said to be the means of clinging to the infallible Imams as the ' Ark of Salvation ' (*kishtī-i nijāt*); their pens are superior to the blood of the martyrs; they are the doors to Heaven, and to insult them would bring the wrath of God down upon the offender. The function of *shafā'a* or intercession was claimed by them, and they also perfomed *istikhāra* on behalf of the Twelver faithful. The *fuqahā'* had posited that the only way to God is through recourse to the Imams (*tawassul*); now, by setting themselves up as the sole interpreters of the teachings of the Prophet and Imams, and as the inheritors of Prophetic knowledge, the *fuqahā'* became the intermediaries through which the masses, of which Majlisī was overwhelmingly contemptuous, could reach the Imams and thus gain indirect access to God. Thus the third tier of the ascending hierarchy leading to the Divine throne was established and an unofficial Twelver Shi'ite 'clergy' brought into existence.[123]

4.9 The descendants of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī

Although relatively little is known about the lives and works of Majlisī's

forefathers, the same can hardly be said of his descendants. Thanks no doubt to the position of Majlisī at the end of the Safavid era and the important role he played as the restorer of the ' orthodoxy ', the names and works of his descendants and of those of his siblings have been well recorded. By and large, Majlisī's descendants followed in his footsteps, and a survey of the later branches of the Majlisī family tree reveals a plethora of *fuqahā'*, *muḥaddithūn* and personalities of political and religious importance.

According to the **Mir'āt al-aḥwāl**, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī had two brothers and four sisters: both of his brothers were scholars and all of his sisters were married to scholars. One brother, Mullā 'Azīzullāh (d. 1074/1663-64) was a renowned externalist and *belles-lettrist* with a wealth to rival the richest merchants of the day. The other brother, Mullā 'Abdullāh (d. 1084/1673-74) emigrated to India. Of Muḥammad Bāqir's four brothers-in-law, two hailed from Mazanderan, one originated from northern Azarbaijan, and the fourth — on whom the source provides no information — came from the province of Fars.[124]

Mullā Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī (d. 1081/1670-71) came to Isfahan from his home province when quite young, apparently to escape poverty. His aptitude for the scriptural sciences so impressed Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī that he gave him his daughter, Āmina Bigum, in marriage. Āmina Bigum was herself well-versed in the scriptural sciences and was said to have attained the status of *mujtahid* in her own right.[125]

Among the second generation of Muḥammad Taqī's descendants there are

at least nine who became or married scholars, establishing links with prestigious merchant and *sayyid* families. Muḥammad Bāqir's daughters married scholars, some of them related. One of his sons married into the *sādāt* of Ardistan. Another daughter married one of his students, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Khātūnābādī, who succeeded his father-in-law as *imām jum'a* of Isfahan at the beginning of the 12th/18th century. The post remained hereditary in this line for the next century, with the Majlisī family maintaining its continuity as the scholarly elite of Isfahan throughout the period of tribulation wrought upon the city by the Afghan invasion. Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī (d. 1151/1738-39), Muḥammad Bāqir's grandson, became *imām jum'a, shaykh al-islām* and *mullā-bāshī* and continued in his grandfather's footsteps by implementing a vigorous anti-Sufi policy, one in which he himself is reported to have personally had recourse to physical violence.[126]

The third generation intermarried with other clerical families in Isfahan and further afield in Mashhad, Najaf and Karbala. A great-grandson of Muḥammad Taqī was the first of several Majlisīs to move to Bengal, where they ensured the growth of Twelver Shi'ite institutions and patronage for Twelver Shi'ite scholars.[127]

The fourth generation continued to produce scholars in Isfahan, although in the Māzandarānī line there is ample evidence of *fuqahā'* tying themselves to the richer classes of the bazaar, seeking new means of economic security when their links to the court were disrupted during the Afsharid *interregnum*. The links between the externalists and the bazaar and the relative political independence this engendered were to prove crucial to the growth of externalist power in the

19th and 20th centuries. This generation did produce scholars, however, one of the most notable being Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbihānī.[128]

Bihbihānī, the first major scholar after Majlisī, established Karbala as the foremost centre of Twelver Shi'ite scholarship in the 12th/18th century. He continued the work of Majlisī in narrowing and defining the field of orthodoxy in Twelver Shi'ism, but whereas Majlisī had concentrated on the 'purification' of Twelver Shi'ism through purging it of non-externalism, Bihbihānī focused his attention on the central question of jurisprudence. He claimed that all who disagreed with the principles of *'aql* (reason) and *ijtihād* as sources of law must be regarded as unbelievers. His attacks were centred on the then prominent Akhbārī school, and his subsequent victory over its adherents paved the way for a great increase in the power and influence of the Uṣūlī *mujtahidūn*, thus setting the tone and direction of Twelver Shi'ite development up until the present time. If Majlisī is the restorer of Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy, then Bihbihānī can be seen as the founder of a new stage in the jurisprudence of that orthodoxy, a concomitant of which was that the *mujtahid* was henceforth considered to be the vicegerent of the Prophet (*khalīfat al-rasūl*), a designation only one step away from the concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, the cornerstone of the present Iranian constitution.[129]

Other important members of the Majlisī clan include Sayyid Muḥammad Mihdī Ṭabāṭabā'ī Burujirdī, known as Baḥr al-'ulūm (d. 1212/1797-98).[130] He was the predominant externalist scholar of the early Qajar period and was responsible for the shift from Karbala to Najaf of the centre of Twelver Shi'ite scholarship.

Āyatullāh Ḥusayn Burujirdī (d. 1961), the last sole *marja'-i taqlīd* in Iran, was also able to trace his lineage back to Majlisī, and thus it is held that the Majlisī family has produced no less than five *marāji'-i taqlīd*: Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī; Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī; Waḥīd Bihbihānī; Baḥr al-'ulūm; and Āyatullāh Burujirdī.[131]

Thus the Majlisī family can be seen to run the whole gamut of religious orientations, from the Sunnite/Sufi theocentrism of Ḥāfiẓ Abū Nu'aym through the ambiguous, middle-ground syncretism of Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, to the staunchly imamocentric externalism of Muḥammad Bāqir and the increasingly legalistic orthodoxy of his descendants, none of whom, according to the sources, expressed any serious inclination towards non-externalism. Accordingly, the Majlisī family can, in its evolution, be seen as a reflection and microcosm of the gradual rise to predominance of Twelver Shi'ite externalism in Safavid Iran.

1. The biography of Majlisī, *Fayḍ al-qudsī*, appears in full in volume 102 of *Biḥār II* and will henceforth be referred to simply as *Fayḍ*.

2. Āqā Aḥmad Kirmānshāhī Bihbahānī, *Mir'āt al-aḥwāl-i jahān-namā* (British Library, London: Persian Ms. Add. 24,052).

3. Dānishpazhūh's *Fihrist* has been used extensively in Chapters III and IV of the present study.

4. *Fayḍ*, p. 9.

5. Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ardabīlī, *Jāmi' al-ruwāt* (Qum, 1403/1982-83), vol. 2, p. 78.

6. Muṣliḥ al-dīn Mahdawī, *Tadhkirat al-qubūr yā dānishmandān wa buzurgān-i Iṣfahān* (Isfahan, 1348 Sh./1969-70), p. 162.

7. See: E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge:CUP, 1930), vol. 4, pp. 120, 366, 403-4; Lawrence Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia* (Cambridge:CUP, 1958), pp. 70-2.

8. See pp. 242 to 244 of this chapter.

9. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, pp. 158-9 and *passim*.

10. Ḥāfiẓ Ghulām Ḥalīm Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Dihlawī, *Tuḥfa ithnā 'ashariyya* (Luckhnow, 1885), p. 166.

11. Mihdī Bāzargān, personal interview with the author, February 1979.

12. See, for example, the views of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, who was born and who most probably died a Sunnite, in his *Diwān* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74), pp. 684-5, 734-5, 746-7.

13. On the misconception surrounding Shaykh Bahā'ī, see: Andrew Newman, 'Towards a reconsideration of the "Isfahan School of Philosophy": Shaykh Bahā'ī and the role of the Safawid 'ulamā,' in *Studia Iranica*, no. 15/2 (1986), pp. 165-99.

14. See pp. 242 to 244 of this chapter.

15. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1134.

16. Pampus, *Die Theologische Enzyklopädie*, p. 55; Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1134; *Fayḍ* , p. 108.

17. Khwānṣārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, p. 391; *Fayḍ*, pp. 106-8.

18. Mahdawī, *Tadhkīrat al-qubūr*, p. 163.

19. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ*, p. 152.

20. Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, *Lawāmi'-i Ṣāḥibqirānī* (Tehran, 1913), vol. 1, p. 903.

21. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 54; *Fayḍ*, p. 110.

22. Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, *Risāla-i tashwīq al-sālikīn* (Tabriz, 1332 Sh./1953-54).

23. *ibid.*, p. 28.

24. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 2, p. 609; Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 3, p. 461.

25. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 2, p. 609.

26. Muḥammad Ṭāhir's attack and Muḥammad Taqī's defence appeared in a work entitled *Tawḍīḥ al-mashrabayn wa tanqīḥ al-madhhabayn*, a thousand copies of which were said to have been in circulation in Isfahan. See: Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1503-4. See also: Āqā Buzurg Tihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, vol. 4, pp.495-98.

27. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1134.

28. Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 3, p. 462.

29. Only Āqā Aḥmad Kirmānshāhī, author of *Mir'āt al-aḥwāl*, cites 1038/1628-29 as Majlisī's year of birth.

30. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, p. 204.

31. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 65.

32. *ibid.*, p. 209.

33. Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 3, p. 457.

34. S. Ṣafarī, *Zindagānī-i Majlisī* (Mashhad, 1335 Sh./1956-57), p. 67.

35. *ibid.*, p. 12; *Biḥār II*, vol. 1, pp. 2-3.

36. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 152. Arjomand's contention that Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī had made a dramatic change of allegiance from Sufism to externalism is totally unsupported by the sources of the period; furthermore nothing in Majlisī's writings points in that direction.

37. Khwānṣārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, p. 603.

38. *ibid.*, p. 330.

39. *ibid.*, p. 360.

40. *ibid.*, p. 150.

41. *ibid.*, p. 395.

42. *ibid.*, p. 397.

43. 'Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 296.

44. Khwānṣārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, p. 615.

45. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā*, vol. 2, pp. 30-31.

46. Khwānṣārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, p. 398.

47. Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā*, vol. 4, p. 386.

48. 'Āmilī, *Amal al-āmil*, vol. 2, p. 288.

49. *ibid.*, p. 353.

50. Khwānṣārī, *Rawḍat al-jannāt*, p. 287.

51. Personal correspondance with 'Allāma Burqa'ī, March 1987. On the contention that Majlisī held views on jurisprudence that were midway between the Akhbārī and Uṣūlī stances, see: Hossein Modarressi Tabātabā'i, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), p. 54.

52. *Biḥār II*, vol. 1, p. 2.

53. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

54. *ibid.*, p. 3.

55. *ibid.*

56. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, p. 209.

57. *Fayḍ*, p. 29.

58. For biographical details of Jazā'irī, see: Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 2, pp. 253-4. On the unfinished *Maqāmāt al-nijāt*, see: Dānishpaẕhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1540-5.

59. Yusūfī, *Surūr al-'ārifīn*, p. 22.

60. For more insight into the trinity of *ḥaqīqa, sharī'a* and *ṭarīqa* see: Trimingham, *Sufi Orders*, pp. 135 and 142-3.

61. Pampus, *Die Theologische Enzyklopädie*, p. 32.

62. Tunukubānī, *Qiṣaṣ*, p. 249.

63. S. Ṣafarī, *Zindagānī-i Majlisī* , p. 53.

64. See the section on *intiẓār* in Chapter V of the present work.

65. *ibid.*

66. Mīr Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī, *Ḥadā'iq al-muqarribīn*, quoted in Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 67.

67. *ibid.*

68. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, p. 292.

69. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *'Ayn al-ḥayāt* (Tehran, 1333 Sh./1954-55), p. 499.

70. *ibid.*, p. 505.

71. Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Khātūnābādī, *Waqāiʿ al-sinīn wa al-aʿwām* (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-i Islāmiyya, 1352 Sh./1973-74), p. 540.

72. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd*, p. 62.

73. *ibid.*

74. *Fayḍ*, p. 21.

75. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, p. 205.

76. Khātūnābādī, *Waqāiʿ*, pp. 531-2.

77. Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, pp. 114-117; Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, p. 76; Tunukb̄unī, *Qiṣaṣ*, p. 249.

78. V. Minorsky (ed.), *Tadhkirat Al-Mulūk: A Manual of Safavid Administration* (Cambridge:CUP, 1980), p. 41.

79. *ibid.*

80. *ibid.*, p. 110.

81. Mahdawī, *Tadhkirat al-qubūr*, p. 158.

82. Khātūnābādī, *Waqāiʿ*, pp. 565-66

83. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 1136.

84. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *The Life and Religion of Muḥammad* [*Ḥayāt al-qulūb, vol. 2*], transl. by Rev. James L. Merrick (San Antonio: Zahra Trust, 1982), p. 387.

85. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, pp. 205-6.

86. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Ḥilyat al-muttaqīn* [with *Risāla-i Ḥusayniyya*] (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1955-56).

87. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Zād al-maʿād* (Tehran, 1320/1903-04).

88. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Tuḥfat al-zāʾir* (Tabriz, 1312/1894-95).

89. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 169.

90. See: ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, *Ḥajj*, transl. by Somayyah and Yaser (Bedford, Ohio:FLINC, 1977).

91. Prayers of this kind from *Zād al-maʿād* and other similar compilations can be found in ʿAbbās Qummī, *Kulliyyāt-i mafātīḥ al-jinān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Gulī, 1389/1969-70), *passim*.

92. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Munājātnāma* (Mashhad, 1354 Sh./1975-76), p. 3-4. See also: Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, pp. 315-43.

93. The Arabic/Persian texts of both prayers can be found in *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*: Duʿā-i Kumayl on pp. 127 to 139 and Zīyārat al-jāmiʿa on pp. 1085 to 1098.

94. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, pp. 168-9.

95. *Fayḍ*, p. 11.

96. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 309, n. 35.

97. Browne, *The Literary History of Persia*, vol. 4, pp. 416-7.

98. *Biḥār II*, vol. 1, p. 3.

99. *Fayḍ*, p. 34.

100. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1138-40; Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, p. 208.

101. Tunukubānī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā*, p. 151.

102. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 82.

103. Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-'ulamā*, pp. 204-5.

104. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 90.

105. Ibn al-Jawzī, 'The Devil's Delusion' [Talbīs Iblīs], transl. by D. S. Margouliath in *Islamic Culture*, vol. 10 (1936), p. 27.

106. 'Alī Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd: tarjuma-i jild-i sīzdahum-i Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyya, 1350 Sh./1971-72).

107. Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague, 1976), p. 25.

108. Ṣadr al-dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī, *Kasr al-aṣnām al-jāhilīyya fī dhamm al-mutaṣawwifīn* (Tehran, 1340 Sh./1961-62). This is a fairly standard manual depicting the notorious antinomian excesses of certain Sufi followers.

109. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1503-5.

110. Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 1, pp. 178-80 and 257-58.

111. *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 285.

112. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Risāla-i su'āl wa jawāb* (Tabriz, 1332 Sh./1953-54), p. 4.

113. Dawānī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, p. 129.

114. *ibid.*, p. 128.

115. *ibid.*, p. 135.

116. *ibid.*, p. 136.

117. Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, p. 31.

118. See p. 242.

119. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, p. 535.

120. Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle*, p. 25.

121. Ṣafarī, *Zindagānī-i Majlisī*, p. 13. See also: *Biḥār II*, vol. 1, pp. 1-5 and also vol. 2, *passim*, for Majlisī's comments on the Twelver traditions concerning *'ilm* and *'ulamā*.

122. See: Tunukābunī, *Qiṣaṣ II*, *passim*. For the *karāmāt* of Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī, see pp. 204-14 and 231-33.

123. On the intercession of the Imams, see: Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-qulūb* (Tehran, 1374/1954-55), vol. 3, p. 38. See also: Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Tuḥfat al-zā'irīn* (Tehran, 1334 Sh./1955-56), pp. 360-5.

124. See: Pampus, *Die Theologische Enzyklopädie*, pp. 53-92 for details of the Majlisī family tree.

125. Kirmānshāhī, *Mir'āt al-aḥwāl*, foll. 33b- 34a.

126. Pampus, *Die Theologische Enzyklopädie*, pp. 60-61; Lockhart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty*, p. 117.

127. On the presence of Shi'ism and Iranian-born *'ulamā* in India during this period, see: Juan R. Cole, *Imami Shi'ism from Iran to North India, 1722-1856* (Ph. D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984).

128. On the links between the *fuqahā'* and the bazaar, see: Nikki R. Keddie, 'The Roots of the Ulama's Power in Modern Iran' in *Scholars, Saints and Sufis*, ed. by N. Keddie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 211-229.

129. For biographical details of Bihbihānī, see: 'Alī Dawānī, *Ustād-i kull Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Akmal ma'rūf bi Waḥīd-i Bihbihānī* (Qum, 1958).

130. Tabrīzī, *Rayḥānat al-adab*, vol. 1, pp. 144-5.

131. There is controversy over the question of the first *marja'*. Most classical as well as modern scholars of Twelver Shi'ite history tend to simplify the entire process by listing all prominent Shi'ite scholars, from Kulaynī to Khumaynī, as *marāji'*. See in this context: Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 252-54.

Chapter V

The doctrines of *intiẓār* and *raj'a* as presented in Majlisī's Biḥal-anwār

5.1 Messianism in Islam

The belief in an expected saviour, who will appear before the end of time to destroy the forces of evil and establish the rule of justice and equity on earth, is shared by most of the major religions. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, who at different times were subjected to the rule of those who did not share their religious culture, cherished their traditions concerning a Messiah or Saoshyant of a divinely chosen line. Such a saviour was expected to come or reappear, by God's will, to end the sufferings of the faithful and terminate the rule of the enemies of God and establish His kingdom on earth. Although the terms 'messiah' and 'messianism' have a particularly Judaeo-Christian colouring and connote a particular set of Judaeo-Christian beliefs, it is nevertheless possible to employ them in an Islamic context. Naturally, the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions differ in the way the formula of the expected saviour is presented. The Christians think of a 'second coming', the Jews of one who is yet to appear, while Muslims believe that a person will 'appear' (*ẓuhūr*) or 'rise' (*qiyām*) near the end of time. The Islamic saviour is the Mahdi, the charismatic eschatological figure who, as the foreordained leader, will rise up to launch a massive social transformation in order to restore the rule of God and fill the earth with peace and justice. The Islamic saviour embodies

the aspirations of his followers in the restoration of the purity of Islam, which will bring true and uncorrupted guidance to all mankind, creating a just social order and a world free from oppression in which the Islamic revelation will be the norm for all nations.

Although there is indeed a similarity between Islamic messianism and the Judaeo-Christian ideas concerning the Messiah, the doctrine of Mahdism as held by Muslims has distinctly different features. Unlike the Christian doctrine, the Islamic concept of salvation does not see man as an innate sinner who must be saved through spiritual regeneration; nor does it conceive of its people's salvation in nationalistic terms, as Judaism does, with the assurance of the realization of the kingdom of God in a promised land by a unique, autonomous community. In Islam — at least for the Sunnite majority — the emergence of the Mahdi is simply a corollary of the historical responsibility of the religion's followers, namely the establishment of the ideal religio-political community, the *umma*, with a worldwide membership of all those who believe in God and His revelation through the prophet Muḥammad. As such, messianism does not play the same pivotal role in Islam that the concept of a divinely chosen saviour plays in other monotheistic religions. For this reason, most Muslims, while expecting the appearance of the Mahdi, do not consider belief in him to be an essential element of the Islamic creed.[1]

The historical responsibility mentioned above also carries within itself the potential for the revolutionary challenge of Islam to any order which might threaten its realization. The seeds of this responsibility, which were to blossom in the

form of numerous rebellions throughout the history of Islam, were sown by the Prophet himself. Muḥammad was not only the bringer of a new religion but also the guardian of a new sociopolitical order. His message, embodied in the Quran, provided both spiritual and sociopolitical impetus for the creation of a just society based on divinely revealed principles. Consequently in the years following Muḥammad's demise, a group of Muslims emerged who, disillusioned with the state of affairs under the Caliphate, looked backward to the early period of Islam — the 'Golden Age' — which was dominated by the charismatic figure of Muḥammad, both prophet and statesman, and which came to be regarded as the only ideal epoch in Islamic history, unsullied by the corruption and worldliness that was to characterize the successive Islamic caliphates and sultanates. Owing to the feeling of the special, divinely-sanctioned status of the Prophet, some of his followers began to look forward to the rule of an individual from among his descendants, 'whose name will also be Muḥammad, whose patronym will also be like that of the Apostle of God, and who will fill the earth with equity and justice, as it had been filled with injustice, oppression and tyranny.' [2] Consequently the personal devotion of the faithful to the Prophet led to their awaiting the advent of a divinely guided saviour from his family (*ahl al-bayt*), even though — and this point must be stressed forcefully — the Quran does not foretell the appearance of the Mahdi to guide the believers in the last days before the end of time. It is inevitable that the constant emphasis in the Islamic revelation on the establishment of justice in both personal and societal affairs would fill a group of people who saw themselves as wrong and oppressed with even greater hopes for the appearance of a saviour

figure. With the establishment in Islam of various orders and regimes which were seen to be lacking in the promotion of the Islamic ideal, the need for a deliverer became intense. This was never more true than in the case of the early Shi'ites, who sympathized with the claims of the descendants of the Prophet as being heirs to the prophetic mission. The most salient factor in the development of Twelver Shi'ism was the concept of a messianic Imam, the Mahdi, whose appearance would herald the end of corruption and wickedness.

5.2 The term al-mahdī and its early use

The term *al-mahdī* is the passive participle of the Arabic verb *hadā*, 'to guide', and means 'the one who has received correct guidance.' Nowhere in the Quran does the term *al-mahdī* appear, although *al-hādī* or 'guide' , which is the active participle of *hadā*, is used twice as an epithet of God.[3] The eighth form of the same stem, *ihtidā* or 'to accept guidance for oneself' is used in the Quran to describe anyone who embraces the guidance provided by God and acts upon it. The term *al-mahdī* is similar to *muhtadī* , the passive participle of *ihtidā*. However, in no sense is the word *muhtadī* used in the Quran to designate a particular individual: anyone may receive and act upon guidance and thus be described as *muhtadī* .[4] Thus there exists no clear, unambiguous indication in the Quran of any divinely-inspired figure who will come, re-appear or rise at the end of time to deliver the oppressed from their oppression and restore justice and spread equity: if such a concept exists in Islam it does not have a direct Quranic basis as far as the surface text of the Quran is concerned.

The term *al-mahdī* was given to certain people during the early years of Islam as an honorific title. The Prophet's favourite poet, Ḥasan b. Thābit (d. 54/673-74) used the term *al-mahdī* to describe Muḥammad himself, while the poet Jarīr also used it to describe the prophet Abraham.[5] The Sunnites also gave it to the first four Caliphs, who were known as *al-khulafā al-rāshidūn al-mahdiyyūn*, the divinely-guided caliphs.[6] The third Shi'ite Imam, Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, was also given the title *al-mahdī b. al-mahdī*.[7]

According to Rajkowski, Abū Isḥāq Ka'b al-Ḥimyarī (d. 34/ 654-55) was the first person to use the term *al-mahdī* in the sense of saviour or deliverer.[8] Yet it is interesting to note that the second Caliph, 'Umar, had toyed with the idea of occultation earlier than this. When Muḥammad died in 11/632, 'Umar claimed that the Prophet had gone into concealment and would soon return; this was swiftly refuted by Abū Bakr, who referred to verses 39:30-1, which state that all human beings die.[9] Al-Mukhtār, who revolted in Kufa in 66/685-86, named Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81/700-01) as a claimant to the title of Imam and also called him *al-mahdī* in what was clearly a messianic context.[10] Later the Kaysāniyya sect denied Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya's death and proclaimed that he was the promised Mahdi, who had concealed himself and would one day rise, sword in hand, to eliminate injustice. The Kaysanite concept of mahdism played an important role in early Islamic political history, with the Abbasid movement, which finally did away with the Ummayad regime, having its roots in the Kaysanite sect.[11]

The Zaydis also used the term *al-mahdī* in the sense of a deliverer when

describing their leaders who rose in arms against the Abbasids: Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya (d. 145/762-63) and Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 203/818-19) are but two examples.[12]

As for the Imami Shi'ites, the majority gave the title in its messianic sense to each of the Imams after his death. For example, after the death of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in 148/765-66 some of his followers contended that he had not died but had gone into occultation.[13] Another group, the Wāqifiyya, claimed the same for al-Ṣādiq's son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, saying that he was *al-qā'im al-mahdī* who would one day rise to restore justice and equity.[14] The eleventh Shi'ite Imam, Ḥasan al-'Askarī, was also the focal point of mahdistic claims, while the most important use of the term *al-mahdī* was made with reference to al-'Askarī's son, Muḥammad. After the alleged disappearance of Muḥammad b. Ḥasan in 260/873-74, a small faction of the followers of the house of 'Alī claimed that he was the final Imam and the Mahdi, who had gone into concealment and would return one day to restore justice to a world that had been filled with tyranny. From this point onwards both the Twelver Shi'ite sect and the belief in Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-'Askarī as the Hidden Imam or the Mahdi came into being.

5.3 The traditions concerning the Mahdi

The love of justice, peace and harmony and the desire for relief after pain and oppression are clearly natural and innate qualities which, with obvious additions and adjustments, have become embodied in the messianic concepts of salvation inherent in the doctrines of the world's major religions. The desire for a better

world and a more equal social order are not solely the products of religious thought. For instance, Marx's idea of a classless society of justice, brotherliness and reason, a new world towards which the formation of all previous history has been moving, is secular messianism in which man, as his own saviour, takes the central role; the Marxian vision is inspired by man's innate need for order, stability and well-being. For Marx, however, the realization of the new age will be an historical event and not a supernatural one like the second coming of Christ in modern Christian belief.

In Islam, as in Marxism, man achieves his own salvation — albeit with the vast difference that man is seen as being answerable only to God and not to his fellow comrades. Unlike Christianity, however, the Islamic revelation does not posit the existence of a Christ-like figure of salvation: the concept of the Mahdi is something that can be deduced only from the Traditions. It is for this very reason that for the majority of Muslims the appearance of the Mahdi is not a fundamental of belief. Yet given the fact, noted above, that man has an innate desire for a better world, and taking into consideration the charismatic nature of the early Islamic leaders and the concomitant tendency of the Muslims to project their aspirations onto individual figures, is it not possible that those narrations which specify the appearance of the Mahdi could be later additions to the corpus of Traditions? Are the claims made by the likes of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, which relate to the eschatological usage of the term *al-mahdī*, based mainly on Prophetic traditions concerning a future restorer of Islam, or are these Prophetic traditions merely a fabricated but totally natural extension and scriptural embodiment of early Muslim desire for a better or ideal society?

5.3.1 Sunnite traditions concerning the Mahdi

There are a number of traditions attributed to the Prophet in the *ḥadīth* collections concerning the Mahdi, his family, his patronym and his general character. The Mahdi, it is claimed, will be a descendant of the sons of the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭima.[15] His colouring will be that of an Arab, his body will be like that of an Israelite, and his name and patronym will be the name and patronym of the Prophet.[16] The Prophet is claimed to have have said that he himself, Ḥamza, Ja'far, 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and the Mahdi will be masters over the inhabitants of paradise.[17] In another tradition Muḥammad is said to have declared that the Mahdi will be from his progeny, will be similar to him in looks and character, and will have the same name and patronym. The Mahdi will be in a state of occultation and there will be chaos and confusion in the world in which people will be spiritually lost. The Mahdi will then appear, like a shooting star, to fill the earth with justice and equity, as it was filled before with oppression and inequity.[18] According to Ibn 'Abbās, Muḥammad is purported to have said, 'How shall God destroy a nation, the beginning of which is myself, the end of which is Jesus, and the very centre of which is the Mahdi, who will be from my family?' [19]

In his work on mahdism, Muḥammad Salih Osman concludes that the aforementioned traditions are weak (*ḍa'īf*) and contradictory (*muṭaḍārib*). 'Therefore, ' he says,'their attribution to the Prophet Muḥammad is to be very much doubted.' [20] Spurious or not, the market for traditions concerning the Mahdi seems to have been a busy one: twenty-six of the Prophet's companions narrated traditions con-

cerning the Mahdi and on their authority some thirty-eight traditionists recorded these traditions in *ḥadīth* collections.[21] It would seem that there is evidence to suggest that either Muḥammad or one of his closest companions had foretold that one day a man from among his descendants would rise to renovate the house of Islam; yet it is equally clear that the political turmoil of the first and second *hijra* centuries encouraged some people to exploit the Prophet's promise of an expected deliverer in order to use it in their own struggle for power.

The Sunnite *ḥadīth* collections contain only three Prophetic traditions concerning the twelve Imams who would succeed Muḥammad. According to Jābir b. Samūra, a companion of Muḥammad, the Prophet is said to have foretold the existence of twelve *amīrs*, all of whom will hail from the Quraysh.[22] 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb reported that the Prophet said that there would be twelve imams (*a'imma*) after him, all of them from the Quraysh.[23] 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd, when asked about the successors of the Prophet, said that the Prophet had informed him that there would be twelve caliphs, the same number as that of the leaders (*nuqabā*) of the Israilites.[24] These traditions have been related by the Sunnite *muḥaddithūn* and are considered authentic. However, they indicate only that the Prophet was to be succeeded by twelve leaders: the word 'imam' appears in only one of the traditions. Furthermore none of the traditions foretells that the twelfth leader will go into occultation and then reappear as the Mahdi. Likewise, the traditions concerning the Mahdi himself mention only that he will be from the progeny of Muḥammad and not that he will be the twelfth Imam.

The unspecified nature of the Mahdi in the Sunnite traditions — the authenticity of which must remain open to question — explains why, as a salvific figure, he plays such a peripheral role in the Islamic belief system as understood and propagated by the vast majority of Muslims. The comparatively low profile of the Mahdi in the Sunnite eschatological schema would also seem to be in keeping with the absence of any clear indications of the Mahdi's existence in the Quran.

5.4 Volume XIII of Majlisī's Biḥār al-anwār.

Volume XIII of **Biḥār al-anwār**, which deals exclusively with Twelver Shi'ite traditions concerning the Mahdi, was completed in 1078/1667-78, although certain narrations used in the work such as the controversial **Chahārdah ḥadīth**, which were utilised in order to incorporate the Safavid dynasty into the 'last days' scenario, appeared earlier in separate compilations.[25]

Under its alternative title, **Kitāb al-ghayba** (The Book of Occultation), volume XIII of the **Biḥār** is divided into 36 sections: 1) The birth of the Mahdi and the biography of his mother; 2) The names and titles of the Mahdi; 3) The prohibition on mentioning the Mahdi's special names; 4) The Mahdi's attributes and lineage; 5) Quranic verses which refer to the Mahdi; 6) Shi'ite and Sunnite traditions which were narrated about the Mahdi; 7-15) The traditions of the individual Imams concerning the Mahdi; 16) The predictions of soothsayers concerning the Mahdi; 17) A discourse by Shaykh Ṭūṣī on the occultation; 18) The occultation of the Mahdi compared with that of the prophets; 19) Examples of longevity; 20) The miracles performed by the Mahdi; 21) The four special representatives of the

Mahdi; 22) On those who have falsely claimed to be representatives of the Mahdi; 23) On those who have seen the Mahdi during the lesser occultation; 24) The tradition of Sa'd b. 'Abdullāh; 25) The reason for the occultation; 26) The test of the Shi'ites during the occultation; 27) The excellence of 'waiting for relief' (*intiẓār al-faraj*); 28) On those who claim to have seen the Mahdi during the greater occultation; 29) On those who have seen the Mahdi in recent years; 30) The signs (*'alāmāt*) preceding the Mahdi's return; 31) The day of the Mahdi's return; 32) The rule of the Mahdi; 33) The tradition of Mufaḍḍal b.'Umar; 34) The *raj'a* or 'return' of the Imams; 35) The Mahdi's successors and descendants; 36) Decrees issued by the Mahdi during his occultation.[26]

Majlisī, while using his usual sources, relies heavily in volume XIII on earlier compilations dealing specifically with the question of the occultation and the reappeareance of the Mahdi such as **Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma** by Shaykh Ṣadūq and **Kitāb al-ghayba** by Shaykh Ṭūṣī. By far Majlisī's most conspicuous source is the work entitled **al-Ghayba** by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ja'far al-Nu'mānī (d.360/970-71). It is interesting in this context to note that in the composition of **al-Ghayba**, Nu'mānī drew extensively from the information given by Ibrāhīm b. Isḥāq al-Nahāwandī (d.286/899-900), whose own work on the subject reflected the views of the *ghulāt*.[27]

In the view of the researcher, four sections of volume XIII stand out as being of particular relevance to the question of externalism, both as it stood at the time of Majlisī, and as it stands today. These chapters are: the test (*imtiḥān*) of the

Shi'ites during the occultation; the excellence of *intiẓār*; the tradition of Mufaḍḍal b.'Umar; and the *raj'a* of the Imams. The first two deal with the trials and duties of the Twelver Shi'ites during the greater occultation, and as such lay the foundations upon which the sociopolitical and religious attitudes and orientations of the Twelver Shi'ites are to be structured. The second two focus on what is basically the outcome of *intiẓār*, namely the return of not only the Mahdi but also the rest of the Imams at the end of time. The *raj'a* is of particular relevance since it is in a sense the final cause or goal of Twelver Shi'ite externalism, the ultimate objective of the *wilāya* of the Imams, and the core concept in the belief system of the Twelver faithful.

5.5 The concept of *intizār*

Complementary to the doctrine of *ghaybat-i kubrā* (the greater occultation) is the notion of *intiẓār* or 'waiting for the return of the Hidden Imam.' By definition, *intiẓār* is a state of passive expectancy, a doctrine of hope and trust that the Hidden Imam will one day reappear and fill the world with justice and establish the kind of ideal Islamic society that Twelver Shi'ites believe existed only during the short caliphate of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.

Majlisī's compilation of narrations concerning *intiẓār* comprises two distinct categories: the virtue of *intiẓār* as a component of belief; and the duties of the Twelver Shi'ites during the absence of the Imam and up until and including the cataclysmic events that will occur immediately prior to his return.

The doctrine of *intiẓār* has important connotations for the personal and polit-

ical lives of the Twelver Shi'ite faithful during the occultation of the Imam. Firstly, given the absence of the Imam as the religious leader and source of spiritual inspiration, what are the personal duties of the Twelver Shi'ites as believers *vis-a-vis* their Creator, and upon whom is the duty of religious leadership to be devolved? Secondly, given the absence of the Imam as the political leader of the Twelver Shi'ite community, as the inheritor of 'Alī and the embodiment of the ideal Muslim *khalīfa*, in whom the temporal and the religious are fully integrated, what is to be the attitude of the Twelver Shi'ites to the question of earthly government? Before considering these two aspects, I shall review the traditions themselves and Majlisī's interpretation of them.

The traditions in the **Biḥār** which deal with *intiẓār* are grouped under two main headings: the trials (*imtiḥān*) of the Twelvers during the occultation; and the 'excellence of waiting' for the return of the Imam (*faḍīlat al-intiẓār*). Other traditions pertaining to *intiẓār* in the context of events that are supposed to take place during the occultation and immediately prior to the return of the Imam can be found scattered throughout other sections of Majlisī's work; his identification of certain apocalyptic figures mentioned in traditions with members of the Safavid dynasty, collected in a separate work entitled **Kitāb al-raj'a** and otherwise known as **Chahārdah ḥadīṯẖ**, appear in volume XIII in the chapter on the signs (*'alāmāt*) of the Imam's reappearance, but since they are germane to the question of *intiẓār* they will be discussed in this section.

5.5.1 The *imtiḥān* of the Twelver Shi'ites

The disappearance of the Mahdi and his subsequent occultation is presented in the traditions as a severe test for the Shi'ite faithful. A tradition attributed to Imam Muḥammad Bāqir describes the Shi'ite faithful as being like collyrium (*surma*): one knows when it is applied to the eyes but one does not know when it will be washed out. A time will come when a Shi'ite will begin the day in the correct religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*, i.e Shi'ism) but by nightfall will have left it.[28]

The occultation will bring much hardship and many schisms. The Shi'ites will undergo a process of 'sifting' (*ghirbāl*) in which the unbelievers will be rooted out from the believers.[29] Some of the Shi'ites, according to a tradition attributed to Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq, will be like broken glass: through hardship and trials they will have shattered but can be melted down and joined together again. Others will be like smashed earthenware pots which, once having smashed, cannot be reassembled.[30]

A substantial number of traditions prohibit the naming of the Hidden Imam and the fixing of a specific date and time for his return; others freely allude to the number of years which is supposed to elapse before the return of the Imam and the termination of Shi'ite suffering. It is clear from both kinds of tradition that the adherents of the Imams at that time anticipated the Mahdi's rise in the near future. One tradition, narrated on the authority of Imam Muḥammad Bāqir by one Abū Ḥamza Ṯhamālī, has the latter asking the Imam why 'Alī's prophecy, i.e. that the Mahdi would appear after 70 years, had remained unfulfilled. Muḥammad Bāqir

replies that since Imam Ḥusayn was martyred, God decided to prolong the trial of the Shi'ites until the year 140/757-58. When this date had passed and nothing had happened it became clear that God had decided to postpone the relief (*faraj*) from suffering indefinitely.[31] The doctrine used to justify this apparent change of Divine will is known as *badā'* or 'Divine alteration', a concept formulated by the early Shi'ites to justify their political failures.[32] That the traditions often run at variance with each other, namely in the sense that some specify a date for the Hidden Imam's reappearance while others expressly prohibit it, reveals clearly that the concept of a Mahdi or hidden saviour was still in the process of modification and was far from unambiguous. A tradition discourages the fixing of any particular time for the reappearance of the Imam in the near future on the one hand, yet on the other refers to conflict and discord — a true reflection of the political situation at the time of the Imams — and assures the Twelver faithful that the return of the Mahdi is close at hand. No doubt even a vague knowledge of the time of the *ẓuhūr* would have warmed the hearts of the Twelver faithful during those oppressive early days, but one wonders exactly how many descriptions of the events which are supposed to lead up to the *ẓuhūr* were narrated simply to provide solace. Given the severe tone of the Imams in their traditions warning against fixing a time for the Mahdi's reappearance, one is led to doubt all of the traditions which describe the events of the last days and which predict the appearance of the Imam. The applicability of certain traditions, namely those which deem all governments before the rise of the Mahdi to be illegitimate, must also be called into question. It is obvious that if the Imams believed that their ultimate victory

was in the near future they would have given their followers hope by describing the trials and tribulations which would herald the Imam's return, while at the same time securing their loyalty by declaring all non-Imami governments usurpatory and thus illegal. How they would have stood politically had they realised the true length of the *ghayba* is another matter; in the light of subsequent developments it is not unreasonable to assume that they would have formulated a specific political ethos, the true importance of the prolonged lack of which has only in recent years been made clear.

Thus in many traditions those who predict times for the Mahdi's rise are accused of mendacity on a grand scale: no-one should wish to hasten the Imam's return but should instead resign himself and submit to the will of God.[33] This does not stop Majlisī, however, from interpreting one of the traditions according to the method of *abjad* and revealing that the most likely date for the Mahdi's return is 1195/1780-81.[34]

According to one tradition, the *ghayba* will continue for as long as there is unrest among the Shi'ites; the subsequent rise of the Mahdi will be a matter that is completely out of the hands of the people.[35] This tradition is also pregnant with political implications: the Shi'ites through their own behaviour are virtually preventing the return of the Imam. In order that he may return they must forget their troubles and, in the words of many other traditions, remain calm.[36] Yet there is nothing positive and practical that they can do: the *ẓuhūr* is at the command of God alone and has nothing to do with the will of the people.[37]

The overall stress in this first group of traditions is on the hardship and test of trials and tribulations that the Shi'ites must undergo during the *ghayba*. One tradition states that the Mahdi will appear only when all of the faithful are thoroughly demoralised and in despair;[38] another states that two-thirds of the people will have perished before the return of the Mahdi, although it does not specify whether it refers to all people or simply to the Shi'ite faithful.[39] In short, the *ghayba* is presented as an initially short period — seventy years at the least — in which the Shi'ites are to undergo hardship, persecution and discord. The historical sources give ample evidence that the troubles prophesied by the narrators as the prerequisites of the Mahdi's reappearance were wholly pertinent to the lives and times of the Imams and their followers, and thus one can understand the heart-warming effect that the narrations concerning the Mahdi's imminent rise, with all its attendant signs and portents, would have had on the Shi'ite faithful. The traditions do not seem to have been designed to accommodate a period longer than that specified by the Imams, whose calls for *taqiyya* in the context of the question of the Mahdi were made obviously without the foreknowledge that Twelver Shi'ism would one day become the official religion of a whole nation and that, in theory, the practice of dissimulation would become obsolete. Yet Majlisī was able to present the traditions as though they were totally relevant to the times in which he lived, without any apparent concern for the inconsistencies and contradictions which arise as a result of their being applied to the sociopolitical context of the Safavid era. It should also be noted that the *imtiḥān* referred to in the traditions connotes, in true externalist fashion, the trials and tribulations of Twelver Shi'ites as a minority

among Sunnites, and not the hardships which all believers will, according to the Quran, undergo in order that their belief and submission may be strengthened.[40] Self-preservation in the face of oppression from an alien majority, the practice of *taqiyya* in all circumstances, patient submission to the will of God and hope in the imminent return of the Imam may have all been pertinent to the Shi'ite community during the lifetime of the Imams; this kind of *imtiḥān* is difficult to reconcile with the conditions obtaining in Safavid Iran, where the Twelver Shi'ites were no longer a minority, where *taqiyya* had been rendered theoretically unnecessary, and where belief in the return of an Imam who would do away with injustice and tyranny sat uneasily alongside the belief that the Safavid rulers were a reflection of the Divine. The *imtiḥān* remained, nevertheless, a wholly externalistic one, despite the fact that its preconditions had been drastically altered.

5.5.2 The traditions on *intiẓār*

The word *intiẓār*, the 8th form verbal noun from the root n-ẓ-r, carries the meaning of waiting and anticipation, biding one's time, looking on in passive anticipation, etc.[41] In the traditions collected in the **Biḥār**, it is the 'expectation of release from suffering' (*intiẓār al-faraj*) which is enjoined upon the believers, the word *faraj* signifying the freedom from grief or sorrow brought about by a particularly trying ordeal or calamity. The patient endurance of all calamities sent by God is enjoined upon Muslims in the Quran.[42] In Majlisī's collection, several traditions — one narrated on the authority of the Prophet — mention the merit of *intiẓār al-faraj* without specifying the nature and cause of the suffering. In one

tradition the Prophet is reported to have said: 'The best of all acts carried out by my people is their expectation (*intiẓār*) of release from suffering, granted to them by God.' To which Majlisī adds:'...God, Who in His benevolence, will make the Lord of the age reappear to save the people from the claws of oppression and wretchedness.' [43] Forebearance in the face of suffering, a virtue enjoined by the Quran and acknowledged by all Muslims, is subject to a narrower interpretation by the Twelver Shi'ites who see suffering as a particular corollary of the absence of the Imam.

Several of the eighty or so traditions on the excellence of *intiẓār* class it as the best (*afḍal*) of all actions, and in one narration as synonymous with worship (*'ibāda*).[44] A tradition attributed to 'Alī calls on the people to wait for release from suffering and not to despair of God's mercy, for the best action in the sight of God is to wait patiently for release; the tradition goes on to say that to move mountains with one's bare hands is easier than waiting for a government (*dawla*) that has been postponed. The people must ask God for help, practice patience and forebearance, and not act rashly or in haste out of their desire for the rule of Truth (*dawlat al-ḥaqq*). Those who rush matters will regret it: they must tell themselves that their period of waiting will not be a long one so as to avoid the 'hardening of hearts' (*qasāwat al-qalb*).[45] Another tradition attributed to the Prophet has it that *intiẓār* is not only the best action but also the very best kind of worship.[46] Belief in the Hidden Imam is the interpretation given to the Quranic verse, " Guidance for the righteous ones who believe in the Unseen," where the righteous ones are the Shi'ites of 'Alī and the Unseen is God's proof to man, the Hidden Imam.[47]

A tradition attributed to the fourth Imam, Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, says that whoever remains devoted to the Imams during the *ghayba* will receive from God the reward of a thousand martyrs;[48] whoever dies during the *ghayba* with love for the Imams in his heart will enjoy a status similar to that of the companions of the Prophet.[49] Acts of worship which, given the tyranny of the usurper regime, must be carried out clandestinely during the *ghayba*, are more meritorious than those performed openly after the return of the Imam; God will increase the rewards of those who persevere in their religious duties in secret, out of fear of oppressive rulers.[50] Again, this last tradition implicitly infers the illegality of all regimes and rulers until the rise of the Mahdi.

Apart from cultivating hope in the future rise of the Mahdi, the Twelver Shi'ites are encouraged to stay on their path (*ṭarīq*), which Majlisī interprets as adhering to belief in Shi'ism and the 12 Imams.[51] Other traditions stress steadfastness in the *dīn*, or in the creed (*ʿaqīda*), both of which are taken as connoting Twelver Shi'ism.[52] No tradition emphasizes *īmān*, lest it be *īmān* in Twelver Shi'ism or the occultation of the Imam, and exhortations to self-knowledge and gnosis of God do not figure among the traditions at all. Belief in God is, as usual, assumed; it is belief in the *ghayba*, the *ẓuhūr* and the *rajʿa* which is posited as a source of strength and comfort for the Twelver Shi'ites during the long oppressive years of the occultation.

A salient feature of the *intiẓār* traditions is the call for submission to the will of God not only in the context of the prolonged disappearance of the Imam but

also in the face of social and political events and, most notably, the tyranny of the ruling powers. A narration in this context, attributed to Imam Bāqir, is worth quoting in full:

> Abū al-Jārūd relates that he asked Imam Muḥammad Bāqir for some edifying advice. The Imam said to him, "I advise you to lead a pious life and, when these people (i.e. the masses) are in tumult and attain power (i.e. through rebellion), to stay in your house and avoid association with those who rise up in revolt; for their rebellion has no basis and has no clear end or aim. Know that the Ummayad reign will be a long one, which no-one will be able to take away from them. But when our rule comes, God will give the leadership to any one of you from the *ahl al-bayt* that He wishes; whichever one of you acknowledges that rule will have an esteemed position in our eyes; and whichever of you dies before our rule is established (and who has the desire for that rule in his heart) will be recompensed in the life to come. Know that no people or tribe has risen or will rise to defeat oppression and tyranny without being obliterated by a calamity, except for those who fought alongside the Prophet at the battle of Badr, and who shall rise once more ...[53]

The above narration clearly intends to dissuade the Twelver Shi'ite faithful from attempting to take their own fate into their hands by rising up against oppressors or, indeed, from associating or aligning with anyone who rebels against the ruling powers. The forces of oppression, symbolized by the Ummayads in this tradition, cannot, it would seem, be challenged by the people, who must abstain from political involvement and adopt a quiet and pious life, practising the rites and rituals of Twelver Shi'ism under the cloak of *taqiyya* while patiently awaiting the return of the Hidden Imam.

Several other traditions prescribe political quietism and social reclusion. According to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Shi'ite faithful must sit in their homes and not leave them, for the 'rule of Truth' (*dawlat al-ḥaqq*) which is rightly theirs will take a long time to materialize.[54] A tradition ascribed to the same Imam has it that those who act in haste concerning the *ẓuhūr* (i.e. presumably those who pre-empt the *ẓuhūr* by themselves resorting to rebellion) will be annihilated; those who patiently await the return of the Imam will be saved. The people must become like the 'scraps of *kelim*' in their houses; those who revolt and cause discord will suffer as a result.[55] Another tradition, attributed to Imam Bāqir, says that those from the *ahl al-bayt* who rise before the return of the Imam will be like defenceless chicks, mere playthings in the hands of children. Just as the earth and sea are calm, the people (i.e Twelvers) must also be calm. They must in no circumstance rebel against anyone in the name of the Imams of the *ahl al-bayt*. Only God can bring about the rule of Truth through the return of the Hidden Imam; it is not in the hands of the people. One must obey the Imams and submit to whatever comes to pass.[56] Elsewhere it is stressed that while one is awaiting the return of the Mahdi, one must strive to know the Imam — although it is never made clear how — for whosoever dies without knowing the Imam will have died a death of ignorance. To know one's Imam has great benefits, even if one dies before the *ẓuhūr*; and if one does die before the *ẓuhūr*, his 'waiting' (*intiẓār*) will itself have been a release and a joy.[57] Apart from this, one must strive to carry out all of the obligatory duties laid down in the *sharī'a*, which remain encumbent on the individual despite the absence of the Imam. The Twelver Shi'ites during the occultation are superior

to those in the company of the Mahdi for the simple reason that the former must contend with tyrannical regimes, against which they move neither tongue nor hand nor sword in opposition.[58] The best a believer can do during the occultation is to keep a check on his tongue and stay at home.[59]

Finally, the tradition most pertinent to the politcal aspect of *intiẓār* is related by Majlisī from Kulaynī and is attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq:

> Any flag that is raised (by a ruler) before the rise of the Mahdi will have been raised by an idol, and those who obey (this ruler) will have obeyed other than God.[60]

5.6 The political and religious implications of *intiẓār*

In the light of the revolution of 1979 in Iran and the subsequent implementation of the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh*, one automatically looks back to past developments in Twelver Shi'ism in order to trace the evolution of Twelver Shi'ite politcal theory and, by locating its antecedents, to view the current trend in the context of its own history.

In one sense, a comparison of the Islamic Republic of Iran with Safavid Iran, at least insofar as general religious orientaton is concerned, reveals striking similarities, the most salient being that externalism still predominates, albeit in a different guise and with different sociopolitical implications. This will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter.

As for the Twelver Shi'ite political ethos and the attitude of the Twelver

fuqahā' to the question of government and political involvement, the events of the past decade in Iran signify a radical and dramatic departure from tradition, especially tradition as it is enshrined in the **Biḥār** and in the ideas of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī. The notion that the *faqīh* could embrace both temporal and religious power was one that never entered the heads of the Safavid *fuqahā'*, and the idea that this could come about through rebellion would have been anathema to them, however indisposed some of their number may have been towards the rulers of the day. Thus while in content the orientation of the *fuqahā'* of the Islamic Republic is the same as that of their Safavid counterparts, in form it is totally different and wholly without precedent in the history of Twelver Shi'ism.

It has become something of a cliché to assert that Islam does not distinguish between the temporal and the religious, and that there is no concept of giving unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. To state, as Said Amir Arjomand has done, that the God of Islam neither wields political authority nor acts as the politcal source of that authority is perhaps to confuse practice with theory.[61] It is true that in the majority of Muslim-populated states and kingdoms throughout history there has been in practice a split between the 'actual' and the 'ideal', which in turn connotes a dichotomy of 'temporal' and 'sacred', or 'secular' and 'religious.' The idea that a human life can be compartmentalized into the 'sacred' and the 'temporal' is at odds with the teachings of the Quran and the majority of Muslim scholars, even if they and their co-religionists have rarely been able to adhere to them. Arjomand's claim also overlooks the fusion of 'sacred' and 'temporal' rule in the practice of Muḥammad himself and also in the practice of

the rightly-guided Caliphs. For Muslims the best actual realization of the ideal took place during the lifetime of Muḥammad and it is to his example that they all look for inspiration; that they have never been able to attain the ideal is another matter, albeit one that does not counter the validity of the ideal.

In general, the actual historical realization of the Islamic ideal has taken many forms but has never been able to recapture the fusion of 'temporal' and 'sacred' in the charismatic practice of Muḥammad. As A. K. S. Lambton points out:

> Later empires, the Ummayad, the 'Abbasid, the Fatimid, the Ottoman, the Safavid and others, represent different compromises between the world and the ultimate authority of truth.[62]

The *sharīa* had, in theory at least, absolute authority, but the extent to which it was implemented varied in different regions and at different times. There was, however, always a general consensus among Muslims that the only way in which the ideal Islamic society, symbolized by Medina at the time of the Prophet, could come about was through the application of the *sharī'a* and the subjugation of all men to it. It was on the question of how to bring this about that differences later arose, especially between the Shi'ites and the Sunnites.

The tendency among Muslims to see the world in terms of the religious and the secular — a notion alien to the Quran and clearly yet another off-shoot of the confusion arising from incorrect perception of the *īmān*-Islam relationship

— produced the concept of worldly political authority which grew up alongside the concept of authority based on the *sharīʿa*, embodied in the government of Muḥammad at Medina, and thence held as the 'ideal Islamic government' or the ideal caliphate to which all men must aspire. As Lambton explains, the vast majority of empires that have existed since the time of Muḥammad have been led by dynasts whose main motive was power for its own sake: power as the means of self-aggrandizement and not as a basis for the implementation of the *sharīʿa* in its entirety. As Lambton points out, the authority of the *sharīʿa* cannot be implemented without power, yet power without authority is tyranny.[63] It is the relationship between authority (*ḥukm*) and power (*sulṭān*) that has occupied the mind of many a Muslim *faqīh* throughout the centuries. While there has always been a minority of Muslims who have refused to cooperate with theoretically suspect governments, i.e those with *sulṭān* but without *ḥukm*, the majority has always tended to cooperate, believing that the way to preserve the *sharīʿa* and to maximize its application, was to work with the government. In this way the guardians of the *sharīʿa* — the *'ulamā'* — could also persevere to make known to the rulers the duties incumbent upon them as leaders of Muslims and theoretical defenders of the faith. The Sunnites tended to recognise the authority of any government so long as it possessed power enough to maintain order in the land. To resist the ruler and bring about a state of rebellion and anarchy was much worse, in the eyes of the *'ulamā'*, than having to obey an Islamically suspect ruler. This accommodation by the Sunnites does not mean that they were unaware that power without authority was tantamount to tyranny or *ẓulm*; on the contrary, the

Sunnite *fuqahā'* and *ḥukamā'* were always at pains to point out that kings had duties too, which, as Muslims and slaves of God, they were bound to fulfil, and of which they had to be reminded by the *'ulamā'*. The interplay between the ruler and the *'ālim* — with the latter acting as the advisor of the former in matters of religious duty — features heavily in the poetry of the Sufis and forms the basis of the whole 'mirror for princes' literary genre.

The realisation that the practical act of government was implemented in most cases through power rather than authority, and that it was the king or sultan rather than the caliph that was calling the tune, led to the integration of the notion of kingship as an 'essential element in the imamate' into the political ethos of Muslim scholars.[64] Ghazālī and Niẓām al-mulk in particular were responsible for formulating theories of government in which the sultanate, as the symbol of coercive power, would complement the institutional authority of the caliph and would be aided by the *'ulamā'*— or more correctly the *fuqahā'*— whose knowledge was indispensible for the execution of religious and legal duties required by the *sharī'a*. The tradition which has it that the sultan is the 'shadow of God' on earth, in which the word *al-sulṭān* (lit. 'power') referred originally to temporal power in general, came now to be interpreted as referring to the person of the sultan himself. The concept of the ruler as *ẓill Allāh* (shadow of God) was expounded further by Niẓām al-mulk in his **Siyāsat-nāma**, who saw kingship as an imitation of the government of God. These ideas were not new, but they were new to Islam, and it was these ideas that gained currency in the medieval Muslim world, and which were prevalent at the time of Ismā'īl I's rise to power.

For the Twelver Shi'ites, however, the concept of authority was very different. In the 'authority verse' in the Quran, in which believers are instructed to 'obey God, obey the Prophet and obey those in authority', the phrase 'those in authority' was taken as a reference to the 12 Imams, all of whom, it was believed, had been designated as temporal and spiritual leaders of the Muslim community by the Prophet and ultimately by God. The disappearance of the 12th Imam and his subsequent occultation presented the Twelver Shi'ite scholars with a dilemma, as was discussed in Chapter III. In the absence of the Imam, all governments were considered automatically to be usurpatory. At the same time, however, rebellion had been outlawed on the practical grounds that the resultant disorder and risk of anarchy would be far more detrimental than acquiescence in the face of a tyrannical ruler — all of this despite the fact that in the martyrdom of Ḥusayn the Twelvers possessed a symbol of resistence and revolution that could have been evoked at any point in time, but which was not actually utilized until relatively recently.

The attitude of the Safavid *fuqahā'* to government and kingship must be seen, then, in the light of the aforementioned considerations. The Safavid kingship saw as the source of its authority the theory that the ruler is the shadow of God on earth. This in turn was buttressed by the authority which they no doubt felt came from their alleged connection to the 7th Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, a spurious claim which effectively allowed them to parade as heirs to the caliphate of 'Alī.

In his book **Islamic Messianism**, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina criticizes A. K. S. Lambton for saying that in the absence of the Imam, 'all government,

even if the holders of actual power were Shi'i, was regarded as unrighteous by the Shi'i divines', and goes on to mention that this is a much later interpretation, dating back only to the Qajar period, for the early Twelver scholars did not mention anything about the unrighteousness of government during the occultation.[65] It is true that any references to the illegality of government were at best indirect, and it also true that as time passed and practice superceded theory in terms of relevance, the attitude of the Twelver Shi'ites became increasingly ambivalent. However, this should not mask the fact that in the traditions of the Imams, all governments preceding the rule of the Mahdi are usurpatory and illegal, and the supporters of these governments are guilty of *shirk* or associationism; any flags which are raised before that of the Mahdi symbolize tyranny; no allegiance can be paid to any ruler except the Mahdi, etc. These traditions are explicit; even if, as it may be argued, they refer to circumstances obtaining during the lifetimes of the Imams themselves, when release from suffering was held to be imminent, the fact remains that they were narrated time and time again by Twelver scholars through the ages without any modifying statements from them as to the relevance or irrelevance of the traditions for the time in question. By the Safavid period there had been virtually no change at all in the way Twelver Shi'ite scholars viewed the question of government: pressed on the point, all would have clearly upheld the theory that in the absence of the Hidden Imam, any kind of government is usurpatory and thus illegitimate. However, practical demands — including the fact that they owed their newly established positions as guardians of Iran's new official creed to the patronage of the Safavid rulers — obviated any overt protest on

the part of most of the Twelver *fuqahā'* against the illegality of the Safavid regime. There were certain *fuqahā'* — Muqaddas Ardabīlī and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Qaṭīfī are two notable examples — who did dissociate themselves from the ruler and affairs of state, but the extent of their animosity towards the Safavid kings as usurpers is not clear, and in any case their tacit rejection of kingship did not mean that they harboured any desires for temporal power themselves. Although the Safavid *fuqahā'* eventually found themselves with a base strong enough from which to bid for the position of supreme source of authority — religious and temporal — in the Safavid state, and although towards the end of the Safavid era the Twelver *fuqahā'* had virtual control over the Shah and were potentially able to press forward their own programme of just, Islamic government as typified by the caliphate of 'Alī, none of this was to be. Even though the *fuqahā'* had manoeuvred themselves into positions of religious power, i.e. as *shaykh al-islāms* etc., there was no question of direct or indirect religious rule, no concept of *wilāyat* for the *faqīh*, or, for that matter, for anyone else except the Imam.

The original objective of Twelver Shi'ism, an objective which cannot have been lost on the Safavid *fuqahā'* but which they appear to have constantly and conveniently overlooked, is the upholding of justice, itself the *raison d'être* of 'Alī's claim to the caliphate. For the Twelver Shi'ites, 'Alī is the epitome of justice, and his brief rule as caliph an idealized example of the perfect implementation of the *sharī'a*. 'Alī's letter to Malik Ashtar, counselling him on the way to govern, shows clearly that political involvement and participation in government were not something that he would have prohibited for his followers.[66] The ambivalence of

thr Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era can only be a corollary of what Arjomand calls the 'depoliticization' of the *imāma*, which in turn is a concomitant of the occultation of the Hidden Imam.[67]

The occultation of the Mahdi actively precludes the Twelver Shi'ite community from taking the necessary steps to create an Islamically structured and governed society, the implicit assertion being that **all** governments — even those ruled by Shi'ites — before the return of the Imam are illegitimate, and that any uprising which takes place in the name of Shi'ism against tyranny and injustice has no sanction in Twelver *fiqh* and is thus also illegal. This clearly paves the way for the undermining of the political nature of the *imāma*, which in its embryonic state was an overtly political as well as religious concept. The *fuqahā'* continued to stress the historical rights of 'Alī, thereby implying that justice must be carried out (i.e. via Islamic rule), yet they were precluded from doing so because of the absence of the Imam. In these circumstances the *imāma* becomes stripped of its political colouring and degenerates into a purely otherworldly notion: the imamocentric internalism which focuses on the personae of the Imams as semi-Divine occupants of the Unseen who participate in the ongoing creation of the cosmos and intercede on behalf of the Shi'ite faithful.

The Sunnite scholar, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, founder of the contemporary Turkish Nurcu movement, divides the Twelver Shi'ites conceptually into two groups: those Shi'ites who rejected the first three Caliphs as usurpers of 'Alī's rights, whom he calls the 'Shi'ites of *khilāfa*'; and those Shi'ites whose support of

'Alī is not political — and hence not divisive — but spiritual, in the sense that they consider 'Alī to be, after the Prophet, the best interpreter of the Islamic revelation: these he calls the 'Shi'ites of *wilāya*.' It is the first group, the politically-oriented adherents of 'Alī, to whom we object, says Nursi, and not the second — so long as the veneration of 'Alī by this group does not become excessive and idolatrous.[68] By Majlisī's time, a thousand years after the drama of the succession to the Prophet, the concept of *imāma* had lost its political import and all that was left was the hysterical anti-Sunnite invective, levelled against the first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar. The historical rights of 'Alī were still stressed by the Safavid *fuqahā'*, but their sociopolitical relevance for the time, i.e. for the Safavid era, were totally overlooked. The Safavid *fuqahā'*, then, were 'Shi'ites of *khilāfa*' in only its strict historical sense, which now amounted to little more than vehement sectarian sloganeering. It is also debatable whether the Safavid *fuqahā'* could be said to have fitted Nursi's description of 'Shi'ites of *wilāya*', since by this he is referring to those who follow 'Alī as the supreme communicator of the truths of belief, a role which Nursi admits fitted 'Alī better than it did the other companions.[69] However, the *wilāya* of 'Alī as recognized by the Safavid *fuqahā'* often overlooks 'Alī's supposed genius as an interpreter of the Quran, an exponent of *ma'rifa* and as patron-saint of most of the Sufi brotherhoods. The distinctly otherworldly picture of the Imams as painted in the **Biḥār** cannot, then, in this sense be termed religious — at least not in the sense intended by Nursi in his classification. It is the opinion of the researcher that the 'Shi'ism of *wilāya*' can be found in the likes of Mullā Ṣadrā and Ḥaydar Āmulī, who, incidentally, believed that the main function of the Mahdi

would be to preach *īmān* and spread belief in Islam;[70] and as has already been pointed out, it is a matter for debate whether this can actually be called Shi'ism at all, at least in the orthodox sense of the word. Therefore when it is stated that the *imāma* was robbed of its political kernel and left with only a religious husk, it must be understood that the religion in mind is the externalism/imamocentrism of Twelver Shi'ism, a religion whose central figures — the Imams — are all-important in terms of the unseen and the hereafter, but whose impact on the dynamics of *īmān* and Islam in this world is negligible.

The occultation of the Imam was in fact a veritable millstone around the necks of the Twelver *fuqahā'*, the dilemma it posed them being that although society must be governed in some way, until the arrival of the Mahdi all governments are illegal. This naturally led to a compromise, and to a stance which is in practice much nearer to the Sunnite attitude to authority and government than perhaps most Twelver Shi'ites would have cared to admit.

Among the Twelver *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era, three basic positions *vis-a-vis* the government can be discerned: total rejection; cautious accommodation; and wholehearted endorsement.

Total rejection was rare and did not in any way constitute a serious intent of challenge to Safavid kingship and secular power: dissociation from rulers was in any case considered a virtue, although it should not be construed as an expression of opposition. The dissociation from the government which obtained in Safavid Iran was quietist and not revolutionary: there is no record of any *faqīh* in that

period claiming that the *fuqahā'* rather than the kings should rule or that the Safavid regime should be overthrown by violent means.

Cautious accommodation or compromise was, as far as the sources reveal, by far the most common stance — cautious in the sense that although the majority of Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* were often more than willing to work in a system that was in theory illegitimate, their accommodative posture was not designed to bestow *shar'ī* legitimacy on the secular regime. Accommodation in the Sunnite sphere had taken place at a much earlier stage and by this point in time had evolved into unequivocal legitimization. The Ottoman government, as Norman Calder points out, had embraced and supported a religious tradition which confirmed and promoted the legitimacy of the government. Highly flexible, this tradition had as its major benefit stability; in Calder's opinion, the longevity of the Ottoman dynasty compared with that of the Persian ruling houses of the same period was one of the fruits of the Sunnite political ethos.[71] Accommodation for the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'*, for whom the government was by definition tyrannical, was naturally riddled with paradox. For example, *fuqahā'* may be appointed by tyrants and may impose *shar'ī* penalties, but must believe while doing so that they are acting with the permission of the Hidden Imam and not with that of the secular ruler who appointed them; the process of land tax collection (*kharāj*), pronounced legitimate during the *ghayba*, was entrusted to an agent, i.e the ruler or governor, who was clearly illegitimate (*jā'ir*), and so on.[72] The earliest example of compromise in Safavid Iran is that of Shaykh Karakī, whose exploits were discussed in Chapter III. He may be seen as the archetypal compromiser: although

his views on the restriction of the possible legitimate agents of the *sharī'a* to only the *faqīh* obviously implied the illegitimacy of the secular government, he was a trusted confidant of Shah Ṭahmāsp and early in his career wrote a treatise on the permissibility of prostration (*sajda*) before rulers. Although one may object, as Shaykh Ibrāhīm Qaṭīfī did, at the apparent opportunism of Shaykh Karakī, one can readily understand that if the Twelver *fuqahā'* had not reached a compromise they would never have been able to secure the positions they did. The benefits accruing to the *fuqahā'* from their partial sell-out to the Safavid government are obvious.

Wholehearted acceptance of the Safavid dynasty seems to have been championed by the masses throughout the greater part of the era, this being a legacy of the tradition that exalts rulers as the 'shadow of God' on earth, a tradition that had enjoyed currency in Iran long before the advent of the Safavids and which was re-emphasized after their rise to power, with the added ingredient of descent from the Imams to give extra authority. The devotion and support of the Persians for their kings seem to have been immense if Chardin's remarks are anything to go by, for in the eyes of the masses,

> ... their Kings are Sacred and Sanctified, in a peculiar manner above the Rest of Mankind, and bring along with them wheresoever they come, Happiness and Benediction.[73]

Despite the fact that Shah Ṭahmāsp's *farmān* to Shaykh Karakī had made

official the split between the temporal and the sacred, as far as the people were concerned royalty and religion were virtually synonymous, whatever connotations the prolonged occultation of the Hidden Imam might have. Despotism, as was shown earlier with reference to Shah 'Abbās, was seen as a 'Divine secret'; there was no act of corruption, however anti-Islamic, that could not be tolerated by the people's belief in the Divine right of kings, and in the Decree and Determination (*qaḍā' wa qadar*) of God. According to Chardin's accounts, the incongruity of the ruler's public face as shadow of God on earth and protector of religion, and his private face as wine drinker and violator of sacred laws, was not lost on certain of the more discerning and forthright scholars, yet the majority view was one in which the image of the ruler as the *walī* of God, whose commands were to be obeyed without question, remained untarnished.[74]

The epitome of what has been termed wholehearted acceptance of the Safavid dynasty is Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, whose views on kings and their rights were treated summarily in Chapter IV. With what appears to be total disregard for the many traditions he himself collected which outlaw explicitly all governments until the rise of the Mahdi, Majlisī endorses the right of the Safavid kings to temporal rule with great gusto, although he obviously stops short of accrediting them with religious authority, which, after all, was in the possession of externalists such as himself. However, according to Majlisī, it is due to the Safavid kings only that Twelver Shi'ism has its place in the people's hearts:

It is only too clear to all men of wisdom and discernment that it is the exalted

> Safavid dynasty which must be thanked for the continued existence of the glorious religion of their illustrious forefathers in this land. All believers are beholden to them for this bounty. And it is because of the rays from the sun of this sultanate (i.e. the Safavids) that this insignificant mote (i.e. Majlisī) has been able to bring together the traditions of the Pure Imams into the twenty-five volumes known as **Biḥār al-anwār**. It was while I was engaged in my work that I came across two traditions in which (the Imams) foretold the appearance of this exalted dynasty (*dawla*) and gave to the Shi'ites the glad tidings that this glorious dynasty would be connected (*ittiṣāl*) in time to the government of the Hidden Imam of the House of Muḥammad.[75]

The above quote is taken from Majlisī's own introduction to his treatise **Chahārdah ḥadīṯẖ**.[76] The traditions in question concern the rise and reappearance of the Mahdi, and the first two of these purport to foretell the rise of the Safavids as precursors of the Mahdi's rule. In volume XIII of **Biḥār al-anwār**, Majlisī includes them in the section which deals with the signs and portents of the 'last days.' The traditions are as follows:

> Our *qā'im* (the Mahdi) will appear when someone rises in Khurasan and conquers Kufa and Multan and passes through the island of Banu Kawan. A man from our line shall rise in Gilan and the people of Abar (a village near Gurgan) and Gilan will support him. The flags of the Turks will fly for the sake of my son while all about him are scattered. Thousands will be prepared for war and the ram will slaughter his child. Another will rise to avenge the death of that child...only then will the *qā'im* rise.[77]

Majlisī says that the one who rises in Khurasan is either Hulākū or Changīz

Khān, while the 'man from our line' is none other than Shah Ismā'īl I. The reference to the 'ram' killing his child is an illusion to Shah 'Abbās I, who killed his son, Prince Ṣafī Mīrzā, while the one who avenges that death is Shah Ṣafī, the son of Ṣafī Mīrzā, who retaliated by slaying some of Shah 'Abbās's other offspring. It is possible, adds Majlisī, that the rise of the Mahdi will occur soon, given that that these incidents have come to pass.[78] The second tradition is as follows:

> I see a people in the East, rising in order to claim their rights (i.e. the caliphate) but failing to do so. They rise up again but fail a second time. They brandish their swords once more; this time they are given that which they have sought, but they do not accept it until they are well established. But still they will not attain (the world government of Āl-i Muḥammad) — only your master (i.e. the Mahdi) can do that.[79]

Majlisī comments that the above tradition contains a reference to the rise and rule of the Safavid dynasty, which will immediately precede the rise and rule of the Mahdi.[80] The quotations above stand as they appear in **Biḥār al-anwār**; in **Chahārdah ḥadīth**, however, the 'man from our line' is rendered by Majlisī into Persian as 'a king shall rise from among us.' [81] Majlisī's alteration of the tradition during translation hardly seems necessary considering that he interpreted the original tradition as referring to Shah Ismā'īl I and the Safavid dynasty.

Traditions which predict the future and mention events and historical figures who are to play a part in the unfolding of Islamic history are known as *malāḥim.* Many appear among the Prophetic traditions and in works such as the *Nahj al-balāgha.*[82] For the most part, those attributed to Muḥammad are specific

in nature, naming exact names and locating precise events. The traditions in **Biḥār al-anwār** which foretell the events leading up to the reappearance of the Mahdi are notoriously vague and lend themselves to all kinds of interpretation. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, **Chahārdah ḥadīth** made its appearance shortly before the accession of Shah Sulaymān and may be seen possibly as a means by which Majlisī was able to curry favour with the new ruler. If this was his ploy then it was most certainly effective. On the other hand, by incorporating the Safavids into the 'last days' scenario and thus giving them a certain charisma and their rule a patina of inevitability, Majlisī may have been trying to countermand objections to the impiety of the Safavid kings, noted by Chardin, that had been raised by some of the *fuqahā'*, mainly, it must be added, as a result of Shah 'Abbās II's non-externalist leanings. In the opinion of Mīr Lawḥī, a contemporary of Majlisī and his severest critic, it was in order to ingratiate himself with the new ruler that Majlisī felt compelled to interpret the tradition in the way that he did. Majlisī's treatise apparently caused quite a stir among the scholars of the day; Mīr Lawḥī decided that the brouhaha could be ended only if an answer to Majlisī's treatise were written.

Mīr Lawḥī's attack on Majlisī's treatise is founded not on any doubt as to the validity of the concept of mahdism or *raj'a per se*, but on his objection to Majlisī's use of free, personal interpretation of a spurious tradition to prove the legitimacy of the Safavid dynasty. This is not to say that Mīr Lawḥī was in any way a detractor of the Safavid rulers: what appears to have roused his indignation is the assumption that the Safavid rulers were in need of scriptural support for their

rule. Mīr Lawḥī firmly believed that Majlisī had written his treatise on *raj'a* in order to further his own interests and make a name for himself among the people. In his polemical tract **Kifāyat al-muhtadī fī ma'rifat al-Mahdī**, written to counter Majlisī's treatise, Mīr Lawḥī writes:

> Those who claim to possess knowledge and would write books and treatises in order to become famous in the eyes of the people should refrain from citing contradictory narrations, or should at least try to clear up the contradictions; they should also refrain from quoting weak traditions with obscure and mysterious contents, which they use merely in order to further their own interests.[83]

Mīr Lawḥī says that the appearance of Majlisī's treatise caused a considerable furore among the scholars of the day, and that he felt obliged to write a treatise in reply in order to 'put Majlisī' straight.' [84] He says that:

> Our kings are the sons of lords (*khwāja-zāda*) and masters. There is no need for anyone (to prove this) by resorting to such narrations and interpreting in them in such a manner. If (these traditions) fall into the hands of our enemies, the Shi'ite *'ulamā'* will become notorious in the eyes of the masses as men of duplicity and unrighteousness.[85]

The traditions quoted by Majlisī in his treatise are, according to Mīr Lawḥī, mostly weak (*ḍa'īf*) and without basis.[86] Majlisī comes under fire for attributing narrations to scholars erroneously and referring traditions to sources in which no such traditions appear.[87] He is also taken to task by Mīr Lawḥī for failing to see

the flagrant contradictions in the contents of the traditions. One, for instance, narrated on the authority of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, prohibits anyone from determining or stating a time or date for the awaited return of the Imam or, for that matter, any other hidden leader, while another is used by Majlisī to adduce , through the *abjad* system, the coming of the Abbasids as a prelude to the rise of the Hidden Imam.[88] Historically and geographically, too, Majlisī is at fault in Mīr Lawḥī's opinion: the Safavids rose not from the east or from Gilan but from the west, from Azarbaijan and Tabriz; Changīz Khān did not conquer Multan, and so on.[89] Mīr Lawḥī's objections to Majlisī on academic grounds is but the tip of an iceberg of personal animosity felt by him towards both Muḥammad Bāqir and Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī. Mīr Lawḥī's quite reasonable inidignation over the dereliction of scholarly duty on Majlisī's part to eschew the spurious is weakened somewhat by a strong hint of personal ill-feeling, in much the same way that Qaṭīfī's attacks on Karakī were apparently not so much the protestation of an indignant scholar as the carpings of a bitter rival. Thus to Mīr Lawḥī, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī becomes 'that mentally deranged infidel', while Muḥammad Taqī is diabolified as 'the satanic shaykh.' [90]

However, to find a detractor of Majlisī is not necessarily to find a detractor of externalism or, more specifically, of the wholehearted endorsement of the Safavid dynasty that permeates Majlisī's writings. The externalists may have attacked each other mercilessly over the means, but as far as the end was concerned they were of one mind: the *fuqahā'* were the representatives of the Hidden Imam and their function was to govern not the wordly but the religious life of man. By the

time Majlisī compiled the **Biḥār** the position of the *faqīh* as representative of the Imam had been largely worked out, although obviously scholars would go on to proffer further theories and make theoretical modifications as various circumstances dictated. Majlisī, although not a *faqīh* in the strict sense of the word, did however add a new element to the debate over the position and function of the Twelver Shi'ite *'ulamā'* in general and the the *faqīh* in particular. In section 36 of volume XIII, he presents a decree (*tawqī'*) that was supposedly issued by the Hidden Imam during the 'lesser' occultation:

> As for the events which occur (*al-ḥawādith al-wāqi'a*), refer to the narrators (*ruwāt*) of our traditions (*aḥādīth*) who are my proof to you, while I am the proof of God to them.[91]

The Hidden Imam's decree was received by one Isḥāq b. Ya'qūb in reply to his question concerning matters of jurisprudence, such as whether fermented barley water is permissible (*ḥalāl*) to drink or not. According to the version of the *tawqī'* preserved by Shaykh Ṭūsī in his **Kitāb al-ghayba**, the last part of the sentence reads:'...and I am the proof of God to you all(*'alaykum*)',[92] whereas Majlisī's reads: '...and I am the proof of God to them (i.e. the narrators).' Whether Majlisī tampered with the *tawqī'* himself is open to question. The important point here is that according to his reading the narrators alone would become directly answerable to the Imam and not all the Twelver Shi'ite faithful as individuals: a hierarchy is thus formulated in which the commonalty follow the rulings of the narrators (i.e the externalist *fuqahā'*), who in turn would be answerable to the

Imam, who in turn stands as intercessor between them and God. 'Alī Dawānī, the translator of volume XIII into Persian, comments that the *tawqī'* in question shows that during the 'greater' occultation the word '*ruwāt*' denotes the *fuqahā'*, the *mujtahids* and the *marāji' al-taqlīd* of the Twelver Shi'ites.[93]

A brief summary, then, of the concept of *intiẓār* and its sociopolitical and religious connotations according both to the traditions presented in volume XIII and to their presenter, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī , is as follows:

The period of time from the disappearance of the Mahdi in 329/941 until his reappearance prior to the end of time is known as the 'greater' occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) and is a time of great trial and tribulation for the Twelver Shi'ites. The test (*imtiḥān*) which they will undergo will sift out the real believers in the existence of the Hidden Imam from the unbelievers. During this period they are advised to cling steadfastly to their belief in the tenets of Twelver Shi'ism and to endeavour to gain knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of their Imam. The concept of *'ilm* prescribed by the Quran is taken by the Twelver *fuqahā'* to signify knowledge of the commands of God (*aḥkām*) and knowledge of the channels through which those commands are conveyed, i.e the Imams of the *ahl al-bayt*. The earthly channel through which this knowledge is conveyed is the *faqīh, muḥaddith* or *mujtahid*: adherence to these individuals enables the believer to gain spiritual access to the Imam, who in turn provides the means whereby one can have recourse to God. Belief consists not in knowledge of self, knowledge of God or in spiritual striving (*jihād al-nafs*) but through attention to the minutiae of the external, secondary acts

of religion (*furū' al-dīn*), and passive expectation (*intiẓār*) of the Imam's return.

The concept of *intiẓār* also serves to cushion the blows of tyranny and oppression that rain down on the heads of the Twelver Shi'ites from every leader and government until the return of the Imam, for during his absence all earthly governments are illegitimate, and paying allegiance to them is tantamount to *shirk* or associationism. Whatever abjection a Twelver Shi'ite faces as a result of the tyranny of the usurpers, he must accept with resignation and consider it part of the test. He must withdraw as far as possible from social and political interaction with others; on no account must he oppose the tyrant or try to rise up in rebellion. The tryanny of kings is a Divine secret, and it is God and not man who decides when tyranny shall be lifted from the heads of the Shi'ites. The Shi'ites must stay in their homes, adhere to the rites and rituals of their creed, and pray that God may expedite the return of the Imam.

5.7 The concept of *raj'a*

Just as the martyrdom of Ḥusayn b. 'Alī at Karbala serves as the emblem of the oppression under which all Twelver Shi'ites, like the 12 Imams before them, are destined to exist, the doctrine of Mahdism and the return of the Imam symbolizes the eventual victory of justice over tyranny, of relief after hardship and sorrow. In its simplest form, the return of the hidden Imam is merely a particular crystallization of the belief, held by adherents of all major religions, in the primacy of good over evil, represented by an earthly personage who will restore the rule of God upon earth. However, the figure of the Mahdi in the Twelver Shi'ite traditions

is paradigmatic in another sense, for the term *al-mahdī* signifies not only a single leader who will return to mete out justice for all, but also all of the other Imams, each one of whom will make a reappearance on earth at the end of time.

What can be understood from volume XIII of the **Biḥār** is that the reappearance or *raj'a* of the other eleven Imams fulfils ostensibly the same purpose as that of the twelfth Imam, namely the implementation of justice and the reintroduction of the Islamic laws or *sharī'a* in their originally intended form. The word 'ostensibly' is the key here, because it appears quite glaringly in the text that the underlying emphasis of the *raj'a* of the 12 Imams lies not upon the principle of universal justice *per se* but upon the personal fate of the 12 Imams themselves — and, by extension, of the Twelver Shi'ite faithful — and their enemies. If the doctrine of Mahdism in general serves to deflect attention from the notion of divine justice and personal salvation that is to obtain following the resurrection (*ma'ād*), then the uniquely Twelver Shi'ite doctrine of *raj'a* shifts the attention even further away from the idea of universal peace and justice that is to accrue from the revival of pristine Islam and focuses, instead, directly upon the personages of the Imams themselves. While the relief from oppression that will supposedly be enjoyed by all believers as a result of the *raj'a* of the Imams is presented as the most obvious corollary of their return, it is the vengeance that they will seek from their long dead but now resuscitated opponents that overshadows all other considerations and appears to be, in the final analysis, the *raison d'être* of their dramatic reappearance from the grave. In the concept of *raj'a* the tragedy of the Imams reaches full circle, and the imamocentric internalism of the Twelver Shi'ites has its finest

hour.

5.7.1 The historical development of the doctrine of *raj'a*

The notion of a return to earth of certain believers prior to the resurrection was one held in connection with Muḥammad himself, particularly in the incident in which 'Umar expressed the belief that Muḥammad would return from the grave after forty days.[94]

Belief in *raj'a* seems to have been current in Shi'ite circles from quite early on, with the main element being the return of the Imams and their offspring, who had not died but would appear on earth to establish the rule of justice and equity. It was believed, for example, that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, 'Alī's son, had not died but would return to earth after a long concealment. It was from this belief that the Kaysanite sect was formed.[95] Later, in different Shi'ite sects, the notion of *raj'a* was to be found in connection with almost every Shi'ite Imam. The Imams were believed to be in concealment and not dead, as in the case of the Wāqifiyya, who believed that the 7th Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, would one day re-emerge from occultation and assume the office of Imam, and another group who believed the same about the 11th Imam, Ḥasan al-'Askarī.[96]

Traditions on the subject of *raj'a* appear in the very earliest collections and may be seen as having developed hand in hand with the doctrine of the rise of the Mahdi. A such, the concept of *raj'a* — which again, it must be stressed, has no explicit Quranic basis — as the return to earth of a number of believers, headed by the Imams, grew out of the intense personal anguish that the followers of the

Imams felt when they realised that their leaders were, one by one, leaving the world without ever realizing their true position as heads of the Islamic *umma*. As in the case of the Mahdi, the *raj'a* of the Imams would seem to be an inevitable corollary of the despair that the Shi'ite minorites must have felt during the lifetime of the Imams as a result of blows such as the 'usurpation' of 'Alī's rights to the Caliphate, the martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala, and the hardships suffered by the rest of the Imams, several of whom were imprisoned and all of whom were supposedly murdered. The charisma of these figures, who their followers believed were granted the right from God to lead the *umma*, was such that it was unthinkable to the ordinary Shi'ite believer that God would allow injustice (i.e injustice to the Imams) to continue indefinitely, and the world to end without the Imams ever having attained their rightful position. 'Umar's inability to believe that Muḥammad had actually died has already been noted; given the intense devotion of the early Shi'ites to their Imams — devotion which often bordered on the heretical, shades of which are still are still apparent in the **Biḥār** — it is easy to see why the idea of *raj'a* was able to gain currency. Like the reappearance of the Mahdi, the *raj'a* of the Imams undoubtedly helped the Shi'ites to hold up under unbearable situations and to hope for a better future and a just world in which the rights of 'Alī would finally be fulfilled.

Althjough they differ in the particulars of the *raj'a*, the leading *muḥaddit͟hūn* and *mutakallimūn* of early Twelver Shi'ism are all in agreement on the general concept of the return of the Imams. Shaykh Ṣadūq in his **I'tiqādāt** cites several Quranic verses to support the notion, one of them being Jesus's ability to raise the

dead, who presumably lived on earth once more, just as the Imams, their followers and opponents will at the end of time.[97] The 'sleepers in the cave' (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*), who slept for some three hundred and nine years before being resuscitated, are also cited. Ṣadūq then mentions that the Prophet said that whatever befalls his community in the future will mirror past events. If it is true that history repeats itself, forwards Ṣadūq, then *raj'a*, which occurred in the past, must also occur in the future.[98]

Shaykh Mufīd in his hagiography of the Imams, **al-Irshād**, writes that one of the 'signs of the last days' (*'alāmāt*) will be the return to earth of the dead from their graves. Alive once more they will meet and talk with one another and pay each other visits. Commenting on Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's narration which holds that, 'Whosoever disbelieves in temporary marriage (*mut'a*) or the return of the dead (*raj'a*) before the Resurrection is not of us', Mufīd asserts that the Imam was afirming the belief in these two tenets as peculiar to the followers of the *ahl al-bayt* and the Shi'ites alone. Mufīd also quotes Sharīf Murtaḍā who said that *raj'a* denoted the return of an unspecified number of Twelver Shi'ite faithful who will aid the Mahdi in his cosmic undertakings.[99]

5.8 The doctrine of *raj'a* in the Biḥār al-anwār

Majlisī's collection of traditions concerning *raj'a* is divided into two sections: one, under the heading of *raj'a*, which presents approximately 126 traditions covering general aspects of the concept; and another which consists of a single tradition, narrated supposedly on the authority of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq by his companion Mufaḍḍal

b. ʻUmar, and which covers almost forty pages, easily the longest tradition in the whole collection.

5.8.1 The general traditions on *raj'a*

These consist of Quranic verses, interpreted in such a way as to allude to the return of the Hidden Imam and the other Imams; prayers which are to be said by the Twelver Shi'ite faithful and which call upon God to bring back the petitioner during the *raj'a* as one of the Imams' followers; and straightforward traditions simply affirming the necessity and certainty of *raj'a* in general. The overall picture one receives from these traditions, drawn from various sources, is a generally confusing one; as usual, Majlisī does not deem it necessary to explain the many contradictions that exist in the contents of the traditions. One tradition, attributed to the 5th Imam, calls upon the Shi'ite faithful to practice *taqīyya* and to deny belief in *raj'a* if asked about the subject. This is clearly a throwback to the time of the Imams themselves when it was obviously felt that the return of the Mahdi and the *raj'a* of the Imams were not far off.[100]

Several traditions assert that Ḥusayn b.ʻAlī will be the first to emerge from the grave.[101] This will happen, according to one tradition, after the appearance of the Mahdi. He will be accompanied by the same 72 people who perished alongside him at Karbala. The Mahdi will give a ring — presumably the signet ring of kingship — to Ḥusayn. The Mahdi will then die and Ḥusayn will wash, enshroud and bury him.[102] Felicity at that time will belong to Ḥusayn and his descendants, and they will take revenge on their murderers and oppressors.[103] Ḥusayn will be aided

chiefly by the angels, who arrived in Karbala too late to help him in his first earthly existence and who have, since that day, been weeping over his martyrdom.[104] Another tradition eschews the usual figure of 72 as the number of Ḥusayn's helpers and states that during the *raj'a* he will have 75,000 men at arms.[105]

'Alī will return at the same time or shortly afterwards. He will carry a flag and be accompanied by 30,000 men from Kufa with the express purpose of seeking revenge from Mu'āwiya and all their other enemies. 70,000 other Shi'ites will also rally around 'Alī. The armies of 'Alī and Mu'āwiya will meet once more in an apparent reconstruction of the battle of Siffin. This time, however, Mu'āwiya's army will be slaughtered to the very last man. On the day of judgement, 'Alī's opponents will be placed alongside Pharoah and his followers and subjected to the worst possible torture. Then 'Alī and the Prophet will return to earth and the Prophet will become sultan of the the whole world, and the Imams his commanders. The messengership of the Prophet will be open and manifest to all; he will not have to hide as he first did in Mecca. God will give the dominion of the whole cosmos from the day of its creation to the day of resurrection to the Prophet.[106]

Emphasis on revenge, as in the aforementioned narrative, is prominent in most of Majlisī's traditions on the *raj'a*. One, attributed to Imam Riḍā, calls upon people to tolerate patiently the oppressive rulers who govern them and await a day when the Mahdi will come to 'drag the followers of falsehood (*ahl al-bāṭil*) from their graves' in order to seek revenge.[107] Furthermore, God has promised 'Alī in the Quran that he will be avenged in this world (i.e. during the *raj'a*) as

well as in the hereafter.[108] During the *raj'a*, whoever has oppressed the family of Muḥammad will be ready to give the whole world, if they had it, to escape the dire punishments that await them.[109] The *nawāṣib* or Sunnite extremists will have the worst punishments; at the time of the *raj'a* they will be eating filth (*najāsa*).[110]

According to another tradition, the Imams will come back to life in this world to exact retribution (*qiṣāṣ*); naturally this means that their enemies will also return. After taking revenge, the Imams will live for thirty months and then will all die together on the same night. Having avenged themselves their hearts will be at peace and healed. Their enemies will, on the other hand, suffer the most painful torments of hell.[111]

It is unclear whether the above tradition refers to the Imams or to other Shi'ites, for the period of thirty months it totally at odds with the other traditions. Apart from the narration already mentioned which specifies a long rule by Ḥusayn during the *raj'a*, another tradition states that while the Mahdi will rule for only 19 years, one member of the Prophet's household will reign for 309 years, the same length of time as that spent by the 'sleepers in the cave' (*ahl al-kahf*).[112] Another tradition claims that the Prophet will return to earth and reign for 50,000 years, while the reign of 'Alī will last 44,000 years.[113]

The *raj'a* traditions are also in disagreement over exactly who will return. One tradition has it that when the Mahdi rises up, God will revive a group of Shi'ites with their swords and lead them to the Mahdi.[114] Another claims that anyone who believes (in the *ahl al-bayt*) but who dies before the *raj'a* will reside

with the Imams in heaven until the return of the Mahdi, at which point God will revive them and dispatch them to the Mahdi's side.[115] Another narration has it that all of the prophets from the past, and all of the Imams, will return from the grave to help 'Alī; he will rule the world and the true meaning of the title *amīr al-mu'minīn* will be realised. According to another tradition, any believer that has been slain will return to die a natural death, whilst any believer that has died a natural death will be returned in order to be slain, thus receiving the mantle of martyrdom.[116] Elsewhere it is stated that only the 'pure believers' (*mu'min khāliṣ*) and absolute polytheists (*mushrik maḥḍ*) will reappear.[117] A saying attributed to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq reveals that the 'path of God' (*sabīl Allāh*) mentioned in the Quran refers in fact to 'the way of 'Alī and his offspring.' Whoever dies in the way of 'Alī and in devotion to him will, if his death was a natural one, be returned in order to be martyred; if his death was through martyrdom he will be returned to meet a natural end.[118]

Many Quranic verses are adduced to prove the doctrine of *raj'a*; the ability of either the Imams or the later traditionists to read into almost any verse of the Quran signs which refer directly to the Imams strengthens the tendency of the Twelver Shi'ites *fuqahā'* to externalise the fundamentals of belief and reduce them by giving them an overtly imamocentric flavour. The concept of resurrection is no exception, and thus we see verses which are clear references to the resurrection of man in the hereafter, and interpreted as thus by orthodox exegetes, portrayed as portents of the *raj'a* of the Imams:

- 50:41-2 —"And listen for the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quite near, the Day when they will hear a mighty Blast in very truth: that will be the Day of Resurrection." These verses are said by Majlisī to be more in line with *raj'a* than with the resurrection since the revenge of the prophets and the Imams must take place in this world.[119]

- Verse 43:4 — "And verily the hereafter will be better for thee than the present." The 'hereafter' mentioned in this verse is said to refer to *raj'a* since *raj'a* will be better for the Prophet than his previous earthly existence.[120]

- Verse 10:45 — "One day He will gather them together: it will be as if they had tarried but an hour of a day: they will recognise each other: assuredly those will be the lost who denied the meeting with God and refused to receive true guidance." Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is reported to have said that this verse concerns *raj'a* and not, as the Sunnites claim, the resurrection and the hereafter.[121]

- Verse 79:6 — "One Day everything that can be in commotion will be in violent commotion." The word 'commotion' (*rājifa*) is said to refer to 'Alī, who will rise from the grave shaking the dust from his hair and hurrying to the side of Ḥusayn, who will have assembled 75,000 men.[122]

- Verses 80:17-23 — "Woe to man! What hath made him reject God? From what stuff hath He created him? From a sperm drop He hath created him, and then mouldeth him in due proportions; then doth He make his path smooth for him; then He causeth him to die, and putteth him in his grave, then, when it is His Will, He will raise him up again. By no means hath he fulfilled what

God commanded him." These verses, generally understood as a description of man's creation, life, death and resurrection are interpreted in the **Biḥār** as having been revealed concerning 'Alī, who was unable to carry out his duties during his first life and who will be brought back once more during the *raj'a* to perform them as God instructed him.[123]

- Verse 36:52 — "They will say:'Ah! Woe unto us! Who hath raised us up from our beds of repose?' A voice will say:'This is what God Most Gracious had promised, and true was the word of the apostles!' " This too is offered in the **Biḥār** as proof of *raj'a*, when the Mahdi will come and drag the followers of falsehood from their graves and exact revenge from them.[124]

Other verses, not specifically concerned with the resurrection or the hereafter, are also adduced as references to the return to earth of the Imams. Thus the 'signs' (*āyāt*) of God, usually held to signify the verses of the Quran and the cosmos itself, are interpreted as the Imams who will return at the end of time;[125] 'those who may turn back (*yarji'ūn*),' which in verse 43:28 refers to the descendants and followers of Abraham, are interpreted as the Imams who will return (*yarji'ūn*) to earth;[126] one day in the hereafter, which will be like 50,000 earth years, is said to be the length of time the Prophet will reign during the *raj'a*; the 'certainty of mind' (*'ilm al-yaqīn*) which the unbelievers will wish they had had during this life is said to concern the enmity between the Imams and their enemies, and so on. A substantial number of verses that deal unambiguously with the question of the resurrection and the hereafter are offered in the **Biḥār** as proof of the *raj'a*.

The third fundamental of belief, namely belief in the resurrection and the day of judgement, becomes obscured by the doctrine of *raj'a* to such an extent that the reader is left with the impression that it is not the personal and individual fate and outcome of man that is at the core of the Quranic teachings on the afterlife but the return and victory of the Imams. This tendency to see the Quran as a vehicle for imamocentric internalism is summed up best by the words of a tradition narrated on the authority of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and reported by Majlisī, who makes no comment on it: 'The Quran is in four parts: one quarter was revealed concerning the Imams; one quarter was revealed concerning their enemies; one quarter was revealed concerning ordinances and commands; and once quarter was revealed concerning that which is forbidden and that which is lawful.' [127] In this tradition is encapsulated the underlying religious ethos of Twelver Shi'ism as portrayed by the Safavid *fuqahā'*: an Islam whose central core of revelation embraces both imamocentric externalism (i.e. the half of the Quran which deals with *aḥkām* as expounded by the Imams), and imamocentric internalism (i.e. the other half of the Quran which centres on the personae of the Imams themselves).

The remainder of the general traditions on *raj'a* comprise superogatory prayers (*du'ā*) which are to be said by those who believe in the *raj'a* and, in the case of certain invocations, who wish to be returned to earth alongside the Mahdi and the other Imams. The most renowned of them, the **Du'ā-i 'ahd**, ends with an entreaty to the Mahdi to hurry back to earth. Whoever recites the prayer for forty mornings in succession will be raised up with the Mahdi and will help him during the *raj'a*.[128]

5.8.2 The tradition of Mufaḍḍal b. ʻUmar

The ʻtradition of Mufaḍḍal,' as it is known, is the longest one in the **Biḥār** and arguably the most contentious and controversial. Dealing with the particulars of the *ẓuhūr* of Mahdi and the subsequent *raj'a* of the Imams, it has a virulently anti-Sunnite theme and serves as a stark and chilling symbol of the sense of oppression and thirst for revenge that characterised the early Twelvers and also the majority of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era. Mufaḍḍal was known to have held extremist views before his long association with Imams Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim.[129] That Ja'far al-Ṣādiq held the rabidly anti-Sunnite view reflected in this tradition is open to serious question, especially when one considers that he named two of his own offspring after Abū Bakr and ʻUmar, the two figures that the tradition vilifies so blatantly. Furthermore, aspects of the tradition which run at total odds with the most basic Quranic precepts are unlikely to have come from the mouth of al-Ṣādiq, whose authority as an interpreter of the Quran and a master of the art of exposition of *tawḥīd* or Divine unity is acknowledged by Sunnites and Shi'ites alike. A detailed summary of the tradition is as follows:

Mufaḍḍal once asked the Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq about the time of the Mahdi's reappearance. The Imam said that this knowledge is the ʻknowledge of the Hour,' which only God possesses.[130] Anyone who predicts a time for the Mahdi's rise is committing *shirk* by associating his knowledge with that of God.[131] No speculation about the birth, disappearance, occultation or return of the Hidden Imam is allowed, all of this being tantamount to distrust in the Decree and Determination

(*qaḍā' wa qadar*) of God.

When the Mahdi finally does reappear he will put an end to all schisms and sectarian discord; all religions will become one. That religion will be Islam, just as the religion of Abraham and the other prophets was Islam.[132]

When the Mahdi appears, no-one will see him. During his occultation, he will have lived in the company of angels and believers from among the *jinn*, but he will rise alone. He will reappear in Mecca, wearing the clothes of the Prophet and a yellow turban and patched sandals. He will be carrying the Prophet's staff and shepherding a thin goat. He will approach the Kaaba in this manner and no-one will recognise him. He will enter the Kaaba and stay there as night falls. When it is dark, the angels Gabriel and Michael and other celestial groups will descend to him. Gabriel will put himself at the Mahdi's service. The Mahdi will touch Gabriel's cheek with his hand and thank God that the Divine promise concerning his return was true. He will then stand between the *rukn* and *maqām* and shout: "O nobles and those who are close to me! O you who were preserved on earth by God in order to come to my aid! Come forward and obey me!" These helpers will then flock to him from east and west, some from their places of worship and some from their beds, having heard the Mahdi's call. Pillars of light will then appear in the sky so that everyone on earth will see them. This light will send the believers into raptures, although they are still unaware of the Mahdi's return. By morning, all (of these believers) will be assembled with the Mahdi: there will be 313 of them, the same number as that of the Prophet's army at the battle of Badr. At this

point, Ḥusayn b. 'Alī will also return, along with 12,000 Shi'ites.

Any pledge of allegiance to any ruler before the return of the Mahdi is disbelief (*kufr*) and hypocrisy. God will curse anyone who pays such allegiance, which is accepted only by the Mahdi himself. The Mahdi will sit with his back to the wall of the Kaaba, light emanating from his hands, and receive allegiance. Gabriel will be the first to kiss his hand, followed by the angels and the *jinn*. The inhabitants of Mecca will ask what is happening but will still not recognise the Mahdi or those who are with him.

Then, when the sun has risen, a voice will be heard calling out from the east. It will be heard by all men on earth. In perfect Arabic it will cry, "O people of earth! This is the Mahdi, from the family of Muḥammad." And the voice will call out the names of the Prophet and the other eleven Imams. The caller will invite the people to pay allegiance to the Mahdi so that they may find true salvation; should they desist they will perish. All of the angels and *jinn* will kiss his hand and promise to obey him. All of the people on earth will have heard and will discuss the event with one another.

As the sun begins to set, someone will call out from the west, " O people of earth! Your lord, 'Uṯẖmān b. al-'Anbaṯẖā, the Ummayad, has risen in Palestine. Go to him and peldge allegiance, so that you may be saved." All of those who have sworn allegiance to the Mahdi will refute the call and say, "We have heard but will not obey." Those who have have doubts about the Mahdi will be led astray. Then the Mahdi will lean against the Kaaba and say: "Whoever wishes to see Adam and

Seth, know that I am they; whoever wishes to see Noah and Shem, know that I am they; whoever wishes to see Abraham and Ishmael, know that I am they; whoever wishes to see Muḥammad and Ali, know that I am they...I am Ḥasan and Ḥusayn...I am all of the Pure Imams. Accept my call and come to me so that I may inform you about anything you wish. Anyone who has read the holy scriptures and divine scrolls will hear them from my lips." He will then read all the divine scriptures in their original form, before they were distorted.

The Mahdi will then appoint a deputy to rule over Mecca, while he himself moves on to Medina. Before he leaves he will demolish the Kaaba and rebuild it as it was during the time of Adam. He will also rebuild the sacred mosque (*masjid al-ḥarām*). All traces of former oppression in the form of mosques and palaces will be destroyed.

The Mahdi's deputy in Mecca will be slaughtered by the inhabitants of the city. The Mahdi will despatch an army of *jinn* and instruct them to kill everyone there save for the true believers. Only one out of a thousand people will remain.

The Mahdi will take up residence in Kufa, where all believers will then be assembled. All of the people of the world will wish that they could reside there, so hallowed will be its soil. Kufa will grow so large that its outskirts will envelop Karbala. Karbala at that time will be the gathering place for angels and believers. It will be so high in God's esteem that any believer who stands in Karbala and asks God for provisions will be provided with a thousand times more than the whole world. All of the towns and cities once vied with each other for the title of

best place on earth; for example, the Kaaba used to think that it was better than Karbala, but God sent a revelation telling the Kaaba to keep quiet, saying that Karbala, since it housed the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn, was the best place on earth. It was from there that the Prophet made his ascension (*mi'rāj*) and it is there where there will always be blessings and goodness, until the rise of the Imam.

In Medina, the position of the Mahdi will be so elevated that the believers will rejoice and the unbelievers will moan with dismay. The Mahdi will approach the grave of the Prophet. "Is this my ancestor's grave?" he will ask. The people will say that it is. "And who are those who are buried alongside him?" the Mahdi will ask. The people will reply that two of the Prophet's companions (Abū Bakr and 'Umar) are interred in the Prophet's shrine. "Who are they?" the Mahdi will ask."And how is it that from among all people these two are buried here?" The people will say, "O Mahdi, they were the Caliphs and fathers-in-law of the Prophet." The Mahdi will then give orders for the grave to be opened and Abū Bakr and 'Umar to be exhumed. The people obey. When the bodies of Abū Bakr and 'Umar are taken out of the grave it becomes clear that their flesh has remained uncorrupted by centuries of death; they are still as fresh as the day they died. The Mahdi will ask, "Does anyone know these men?", to which the people will reply, "Yes, we know them by their attributes; they were boon companions of the Prophet." The Mahdi will ask, "Do any of you have doubts concerning these two men?" The people will say that they do not. Then the Mahdi will rebury the corpses.

Three days later, the Mahdi will order the bodies of Abū Bakr and 'Umar to be exhumed once more. Again the corpses are seen to be fresh and untainted by decay. The devotees of Abū Bakr and 'Umar will rejoice, for they will see this as a sign of their (the Caliphs') righteousness. "We are proud of our devotion to these two men," they will say. Then one of the Mahdi's followers will call out: "All those who love these two companions of the Prophet, stand to one side." The people will split into two groups. The Mahdi will then command the group which professes devotion to Abū Bakr and 'Umar to recant and express their hatred for them. This group will say, "O Mahdi! Before we knew what you felt about these two Caliphs we did not hate them. An now, now that we see (through the miracle of their bodies being preserved) that they have such an exalted position in God's sight, how can we hate them?"

The Mahdi will then, by God's leave, command a swirling black wind to descend on the devotees of Abū Bakr and 'Umar and destroy them. Then he will command his men to bring the bodies of the two companions down from the tree on which they have been hanging on his previous orders. By God's leave he will bring Abū Bakr and 'Umar back to life and then give orders for everyone to assemble. The Mahdi will then give the people a detailed account of the two companions' lives and deeds. He will give an account of the slaying of Abel by Cain; the trial of Abraham by fire; the incarceration of Joseph in the well; the punishment of Jonah in the belly of the whale; the murder of Yaḥyā; the crucifixion of Jesus; the torture of Jirjīs (St. George) and Daniel; the wounds of Salmān al-Fārsī; the incident in which the door of the house of 'Alī was burned by an angry mob, injuring Fāṭima

and causing her to miscarry; the poisoning of Imam Ḥasan; the martrydom of Ḥusayn and his followers and children. All of these incidents will be blamed by the Mahdi on Abū Bakr and 'Umar. All of the blood unlawfully spilled from the beginning of time, all rapes of innocent women, all treachery and acts of vice, all sins and oppression and injustice, all acts of wrongdoing from the time of Adam until the rise of the Mahdi — all of these will be blamed on Abū Bakr and 'Umar. The case against them will be proven, and they will confess to their crimes.

At this point the Mahdi will invite anyone present who has been wronged by Abū Bakr and 'Umar to come forward and exact retribution. This will take place. The two companions will be strung up once more on the branch of a tree. The Mahdi will then command a fire to rise up out of the ground. The fire will consume the tree and the companions along with it. The Mahdi will command the wind to scatter the ashes of Abū Bakr and 'Umar over the sea. But this will not be the end of their torture, for on the day of resurrection all believers will assemble with the 'Fourteen' (Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima and the other eleven Imams) to take further revenge from the two companions. They will be put to death and revived a thousand times a day and their torture will be endless.

The Mahdi will then proceed to Baghdad, which will be the most accursed city on God's earth. Corruption and insurrection will destroy the city and it will be deserted. Woe to Baghdad and its people! All of the tortures visited on men since the day of creation will descend on Baghdad. Woe to anyone living there! The people of Baghdad will be the most corrupt on earth; they will have known

such opulence and ease that they will imagine it is heaven on earth. Lies, vice, depravity, drinking, adultery and murder will be such that God will destroy the city by the means of its own wrongdoing. He will unleash armies on it from all directions and Baghdad will be flattened without a trace.

At this point a Ḥasanid *sayyid* will rise in Daylam and invite people to the side of the Mahdi. Men of strong faith will rise from Talighan on swift horses. They will be equipped with weapons and will cut a swathe through (Persia), killing every tyrant that tries to stop them, until they reach Kufa where they will take up residence.

The Ḥasanid *sayyid* will meet the Mahdi and he and his men will pledge allegiance. Only the Zaydites from among the people will refuse to kiss the Mahdi's hand. The Zaydites will reject the return of the Mahdi as sorcery. The Mahdi will advise them to think again, but they will refuse and finally he will be forced to slay them.

The Mahdi will then prepare to fight the Sufyānī in Damascus; the latter will be captured and beheaded on a rock. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, with 12,000 trusted companions and 72 of his fellow martyrs from Karbala will then appear. This will be a 'return of light' (*raj'at nūriyya*). 'Alī will reappear and erect a tent, one pole of which will be in Najaf, one in Medina, one in Mecca and one on the hill of Ṣafa, near Mecca. The heavens and the earth will be illuminated and the secrets of all men revealed. Nursing mothers will flee in terror from their offspring. The Prophet and his companions and all of those who believed in his prophethood will

return to earth. Also, all of those who refused to believe in him and who opposed him will be returned so that vengeance may be exacted from them.

Then all of the Imams will reapppear and line up in front of the Prophet in order to complain of the oppression they have suffered in their previous earthly existence. "We have been accused, oppressed, cursed, threatened, imprisoned and poisoned, " they will say. The Prophet will weep bitterly and say, "O my children! I have indeed suffered more than you."

One by one the Imams will step forward to recount their tragedies. Fāṭima will be the first to plead for justice. She will vilify Abū Bakr and 'Umar on account of their wrongful appropriation of her land at Fadak, their usurpation of the Caliphate, and their forced entry into 'Alī's house. Then 'Alī will step forward and make similar complaints and this will continue until all of the Imams have pleaded for justice and asked for revenge for all of the oppression and tortures they received from their opponents during their first lives. Finally, the Mahdi will step forward to complain about all those who disbelieved in his return.

Having heard all of their pleas for justice and revenge, the Prophet will turn to the Imams and say, " I thank God that He kept His promise to us and made us inheritors of the earth. We can live in any part of Heaven that we choose. How good is the reward of those who do good deeds. God's help and victory are at hand." He will then read the Quranic verse which describes this victory, a victory which comes to wash away all sins. (At this point Mufaḍḍal asks Ja'far al-Ṣādiq what sins the Prophet could possibly have had. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq answers that the

Prophet once asked God to make him responsible for all of the sins of the *shī'a* of 'Alī. God granted this request, placed all of the burdens of the sins of the *shī'a* on his shoulders, and then forgave him. But, said Ṣādiq, this must not be told to all Shi'ites in case some of them become lax in their actions and thus deprive themselves of the Prophet's intercession and of God's mercy.

The Mahdi will then return to Kufa where golden locusts will rain from the sky. He will then destroy the mosque erected by Yazīd after the martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala. He will also destroy all other mosques built by tyrants. [End of tradition].[133]

To none of the contents of the above tradition has Majlisī any objection, and the only criticism that he makes is directed at Mufaḍḍal's scrambling of historical facts concerning the identity of the founder of Samarra, the Mahdi's birthplace. The rest he accepts without question.

As for the attribution of all sins to the two companions, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, Majlisī staunchly defends the tradition. The reason, he says, is quite clear: Abū Bakr and 'Umar deprived 'Alī of his rights (i.e. to the Caliphate) and this resulted in all of the other Imams being deprived of their rightful positions. Consequently, tyrannical caliphs came to power, who will rule until the rise of the Mahdi. This tyranny is the source of and reason for the infidelity of all infidels, the vice of all sinners, and the going astray of all who have gone astray. If the Imam (i.e. 'Alī) had become Caliph he would have been able to prevent unbelief and sin and going astray. The reason why he was unable to do so during his own

short caliphate was that Abū Bakr and 'Umar had already laid the foundations of tyranny and oppression, and these had taken root in the hearts of the people. The sins of all men are attributable to Abū Bakr and 'Umar because these two men did not object to the evil deeds of men like themselves. If they had objected to evil, they themselves would not have committed it. And if anyone does not object to evil deeds it is as if he himself has committed them.[134] Majlisī then goes on to say that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the impure spirits of Abū Bakr and 'Umar may actually participate in the evil deeds of ordinary men, just as the pure spirits of the Imams are present in the good deeds of the prophets.[135]

It is clear that Majlisī's attribution of all sins to the first two Caliphs in the 'tradition of Mufaḍḍal' is in total contradiction with the Quranic concept of divine justice as presented in many of its verses. Man's misfortunes — earthly or otherwise — are held by the Quran to be the result of his own misdeeds, and not the works of others.[136] Man will be judged by his own record, and not by the record of others.[137] Most explicit and unambiguous is the Quranic statement on personal responsibility: 'Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.' [138]

As in the case of so many other traditions narrated in the **Biḥār**, Majlisī appears not to notice the glaring contradictions and flagrant violations of Quranic teaching therein; if he does notice them then he conveniently overlooks them. To be fair, it is true that a great number of traditions, authentic or spurious, may have passed into the **Biḥār** without his inspection, collected and edited by his

students. It is only when he himself actually comments on a particular tradition that his own view and position come under the spotlight, as in the case of the tradition in question. However, in his enthusiasm to confirm the diabolification of Abū Bakr and 'Umar he seems to have genuinely overlooked another highly pertinent comment supposedly made by al-Ṣādiq, namely that any allegiance paid to any ruler before the advent of the Mahdi is tantamount to *kufr* or unbelief. In his comments on the 'tradition of Mufaḍḍal' Majlisī himself demurs that because of the 'sins' of the first two Caliphs, all rulers from that day forward until the coming of the Mahdi were bound to be despotic. The notion of unbroken tyranny until the end of time, while dovetailing neatly with the Twelver Shi'ite ethos of suffering and martyrdom, sits uneasily alongside Majlisī's own wholehearted acceptance of the Safavid dynasty and his fulsome praise of its rulers as propagators and defenders of Islam. This obvious contradiction, barely touched upon by the Twelver scholars of the time, is possibly one of the reasons why Majlisī attempted to incorporate the Safavid rulers in the 'last days' scenario: by transforming figures such as Shah Ismā'īl into prophesized precursors of the Hidden Imam he allowed them to partake of the charisma that such a role would exude, thereby deflecting attention from the fact that according to other traditions each and every one of the Safavid rulers was by definition an usurper whose claim to power was disowned by the Imams and whose supporters, through their allegiance, were cursed by God.

5.9 The *raj'a*: a major factor in Twelver Shi'ite externalism

Islamic externalism, in the broadest sense of the term, implies an underem-

phasis of the core aspects of the religion — most notably the centrality of *īmān* and *ma'rifa* — and an over emphasis of its secondary concerns, the main pillar of which is action (*'amal*) and whose basic vehicle of expression is *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*. In the case of Twelver Shi'ism, as we have seen, a new element is added: imamocentric internalism, in which knowledge (*ma'rifa*) is basically knowledge of the Imam (*ma'rifat al-imām*), without which one cannot be a true believer. Imamocentric internalism, in which the figure of the Imam is pivotal, does not overthrow theocentric internalism but overshadows it, to the point where half of the Quran is perceived as being about the Imams and their enemies, and the other half about God's ordinances concerning the allowed and the forbidden, jurisdiction over which is the domain of the Imams themselves. By its very nature, imamocentric internalism goes hand in hand with *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* in the externalization of religious belief, that is in the sense that it focuses primarily on other-than-God rather than on God, or rather than on the fundamental beliefs whose total assimilation the Quran deems essential for salvation.

The doctrine of *raj'a* is an externalizing factor *par excellence* in that it effectively plays down the *qiyāma* or resurrection and directs attention not upon the justice which, according to the Quran, will be meted out to each individual, but upon the very particularized justice that will be the lot of the Imams upon their return to earth. If justice is to be for all, then it will be a purely secondary consideration: since the oppression and suffering of the Twelver Shi'ites throughout history is perceived as a corollary of the oppression and suffering of the Imams, relief (*faraj*) will obtain only when the Imams take revenge on their oppressors and

secure their rights. It is the suffering of the Imams and their eventual victory which form the cornerstone of the twin doctrines of *intiẓār* and *raj'a*, and as such the fate of the individual appears to be of little consequence, the question of reward or punishment being academic given the fact that through the Prophet's intercession the sins of all Twelver Shi'ites have already been forgiven.

The period of *intiẓār*, then, as a preliminary of *ẓuhūr/ raj'a*, is patient, uncomplaining toleration of the world as it is, together with ardent belief in those who will return to earth to take revenge on those who were primarily responsible for making the world how it is, i.e. the enemies of the Imams, and thus in a roundabout way secure justice. Before the advent of the Mahdi, all earthly governments are unlawful and therefore oppressive, yet the Twelver Shi'ite believer can do nothing to alleviate this oppression save by nurturing hope for future relief. The practice of *taqīyya* is enjoined, self-isolation recommended, and total submission to fate prescribed. Although the martyrdom of Ḥusayn is extolled, any attempt to emulate him by rising up in the face of oppression before the coming of the Mahdi is condemned, and allegiance to anyone except the Mahdi is synonymous with unbelief. The Twelver Shi'ite must patiently bear whatever is heaped upon him and await the return of the Mahdi and the other Imams in order to secure relief from oppression: indeed, *intiẓār* is posited as its own reward.

The role of the Imams is, of course, all important in the doctrines of *intiẓār*, *ẓuhūr* and *raj'a*. As the **Biḥār** demonstrates, history is their story. The usurpation of the rights of 'Alī to the Caliphate, the martyrdom of Ḥusayn in defence of those

rights, the subsequent oppression of all Twelver Shi'ites on account of their belief in those rights, and the eventual return of the Imams to earth in order to secure those rights — these are the major recurring themes in Twelver Shi'ite devotional life as portrayed by the **Biḥār**.

In short, the *ẓuhūr* and the *raj'a* provide a panoramic backdrop against which the tragedy of the Imams is brought to a climax. One by one the leading characters return to the stage, heralded by the Mahdi, to perform the triumphant final act in full view of revived and reassembled spectators. The Prophet will conquer the world with his revelation; 'Alī will begin a rule lasting thousands of years; the martyrs of Karbala will be avenged; and evil — in the form of the enemies of the Imams — will be expunged from the face of the earth. The wheel turns full circle and the promise of God, namely that the Imams should become heirs to the earth, is finally and unquestionably fulfilled.

5.10 Safavid Shi'ism versus the Shi'ism of 'Alī: a contemporary critique

The most vehement attack in recent years on the particular face of Islam presented by the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era was conducted by the late Iranian sociologist and self-styled Islamologist, 'Alī Sharī'atī. His highly polemical tract, **Tashayyu'-i 'Alawī, tashayyu'-i Ṣafawī**, echoes of which resound through his whole body of writings, may be seen as one of the central pillars supporting the revitalization of Twelver Shi'ite Islam among the younger generation of Iranian Muslims in the past twenty five years.

Sharī'atī's views on the Twelver Shi'ism embodied in works such as the

Biḥār are crystallized in the final passages of the aforementioned work, in which he looks at the basis of Twelver Shi'ism from two standpoints: one which he calls 'Safavid Shi'ism', a rubric that encompasses all that Sharī'atī sees as a gross misrepresentation of Shi'ite Islam; and one which he terms 'Alid Shi'ism', for him the true, original and ideal Islam.

According to Sharī'atī, the concept of *imāma* as preached by the Safavid *fuqahā'* consists of belief in twelve holy, infallible, supernatural and supra-human names (*ism*) which are the only means through which one may approach God, i.e. through intercession. They are twelve angels to be worshipped, twelve minor gods arranged around the 'great God.' In Alid Shi'ism, on the other hand, the *imāma* is pure and revolutionary leadership designed to guide the people and construct the ideal society; the Imams are the embodiment of religion who must be known and followed, and from whom awareness and knowledge must be gained.[140]

According to Sharī'atī, the concept of *'iṣma* or infallibility in Safavid Shi'ism consists of belief in the special essence and exceptional qualities of beings in the unseen realm who are unlike other men and who cannot err or sin, namely the 'fourteen pure ones' (*chahārdah ma'ṣūm*). This belief implies that the rule of traitors and the religious authority of corrupt and impure clerics (*rūḥānī*) are only natural since all men save for the Imams are fallible. In Alid Shi'ism, on the other hand, *'iṣma* means belief in the purity and righteousness of the intellectual and social leaders and the responsible guardians of the faith, and of science and government. This means a negation of the rule of traitors and a negation of the

authority of corrupt clerics attached to the ruling power.[141]

The concept of *wilāya* in Safavid Shi'ism, says Sharī'atī, means loving only 'Alī and abandoning all responsibilities, since it is through this love that one attains Paradise or avoids Hell. In Safavid Shi'ism the *wilāya* of the house of 'Alī has nothing to do with how society should be ruled; rather, it is an aid to God in His supervision of the cosmos. In Alid Shi'ism, however, *wilāya* means loving only the leadership and government of 'Alī, and of governments like that of 'Alī, whose leadership is like a light which guides mankind and of which all men, for the sake of justice, are in need.[142]

As for justice itself, Sharī'atī says that in Safavid Shi'ism it becomes a subject for theological debate: justice is relevant to the hereafter, and man's interest in the question is limited to speculation on how God will judge and mete out justice in the world to come. The question of justice is irrelevant to this world: justice in this world is the domain of Shah 'Abbās. In Safavid Shi'ism , that which belongs to Caesar is rendered unto Caesar, and that which belongs to God is rendered unto Him. This world is the realm of Shah 'Abbās; the world of the hereafter is the realm of God. In Alid Shi'ism, justice means believing that since God is just and the cosmos founded on justice, society too must run acording to the dictates of justice; injustice and inequality are unnatural states and as such are anti-God. Justice is the supreme aim of prophethood.[143]

In Safavid Shi'ism, says Sharī'atī, *intiẓār* entails spiritual and practical submission to the *status quo*; it justifies corruption and looks upon everything with

the eye of predestination. It is the negation of responsibility, it brings depair to the heart and engenders the belief that all action is doomed to failure. In Alid Shi'ism, however, *intiẓār* is spiritual and practical readiness, coupled with belief in an eventual change for the better; *intiẓār* is revolution; it is belief that the world must be changed and that oppression will end and justice prevail; it is the belief that the dowtrodden classes will rise up and inherit the earth.[144]

According to Sharī'atī, in Safavid Shi'ism the doctrine of *ghayba* or occultation absolves the individual of all personal responsibility; *ghayba* renders redundant all of Islam's social rules. The *ghayba* posited by the Safavid *fuqahā'* obviates social responsibility on the part of the individual since it is the Hidden Imam alone who can lead the community. It is only the Imam to whom allegiance can be paid and to whom men must answer; since he is absent, however, man can do nothing. In Alid Shi'ism, *ghayba* makes man responsible for choosing his own fate, belief, leadership and social and spiritual way of life. It makes him responsible for choosing an aware and responsible leader from among the people who can act as successor to the Imam.[145]

In short, in Sharī'atī's analysis, Safavid Shi'ism is the Shi'ism of ignorance (*jahl*) and blind devotion; it is the Shi'ism of innovation (*bid'a*), discord (*tafraqa*), otherwordly justice, irresponsibility, associationism (*shirk*), intellectual stagnation (*jumūd*) and death. Alid Shi'ism, by contrast, is the Shi'ism of awareness and conscious devotion; it is the Shi'ism of sanctioned custom (*sunna*), concord, earthly justice, responsibility, Divine unity, independent judgement (*ijtihād*) and martyr-

dom. Safavid Shi'ism cries over the death of Ḥusayn; Alid Shi'ism follows in Ḥusayn's path and views Karbala not in the light of tragedy but in the light of revolution. Safavid Shi'ism enslaves; Alid Shi'ism liberates.[146]

From **Tashayyu'-i 'Alawī** and his other writings it is clear that Sharī'atī's criticism of the Safavid *fuqahā'* is markedly different from Ghazālī's attack on the corruptors of the terms *'ilm* and *'ulamā'* or Mullā Ṣadrā's invective against the hide-bound externalists of his day. Sharī'atī does not take the Safavid *fuqahā'* to task on the grounds that they have neglected the question of *ma'rifat Allāh* or *ma'rifat al-nafs* for the sake of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, although he is at times quite scathing in his rejection of their overemphasis on jurisprudence. It was not the question of belief that bothered Sharī'atī but rather the question of action — revolutionary action — that he saw as the aim and *raison d'être* of Shi'ism. In this respect, Sharī'atī's attack on the externalism of the Safavid *fuqahā'* should not be seen as that of a concerned internalist wishing to redress the balance between the two aspects of the revelation (i.e. internalism and externalism), but rather as that of someone who wishes to redefine externalism on his own terms, without any proper reference to an internalist basis.

Sharī'atī's development of the concept of Alid Shi'ism, a system identified with the authoritative figure of Imam 'Alī, was appraised by Nikkie Keddie as follows:

> By systematizing the concept of Alid Shi'ism, Shari'ati attained a double result; he detached himself from the petrified official Islam rejected by idealistic youth, and

he brought a new and combative meaning to Shi'a concepts. Even prayer in this renovated Islam took on a political meaning, tied to action. This insurrectional meaning of common prayer was particularly developed in the 1978-1979 revolution.[147]

Only a full and detailed study of all of Sharī'atī's writings would enable one to confirm or refute the implication made by one writer that Sharī'atī's allegiance to Shi'ism was almost purely utilitarian and that the key concepts of Shi'ism were remoulded as vehicles for his own aims.[148] What is important from the point of view of the present work is that Sharī'atī was able to identify the problems of externalism yet, instead of advocating a return to fundamentals as Ghazālī and Mullā Ṣadrā did, prescribed a whole new set of values which, although appearing to be totally divorced from what he calls the 'stagnation' of Safavid Shi'ite externalism, in practice amount to little more than a variation on the same theme.

Undoubtedly it was the stultifying effect that the externalism of the Safavid *fuqahā'* had on the masses, especially with respect to questions such as the *ghayba* and *intiẓār* in which patience, resignation and submission were enjoined, that prompted Sharī'atī, whatever his inner motives, to interpret Twelver Shi'ism in a new and revolutionary way. Although it may be argued that certain features such as the martyrdom of Ḥusayn at Karbala and the rise of the Mahdi are pregnant with revolutionary meaning, it was the negative aspects of these features that had traditionally been stressed by Twelver scholars; although Islam as a political vehicle was obviously not unknown before the writings of Sharī'atī gained popularity, he was possibly the first contemporary Iranian thinker to interpret Islam as

a total 'ideology': an ideology of emancipation and liberation with an overwhelmingly political flavour. In rejecting the *fuqahā'* of the Safavid period, whom he used as a symbol of religious stagnation, he also tended to reject all figures of authority operating in the traditional Islamic world; he wrote, he says, not as a philosopher or an historian or a *faqīh* or a theologian but as one who is above or divorced from all of these. In doing so he overlooked the fact that not all Islamic scholars are Safavid externalists, and that all knowledge does not necessarily concern details of ablution or detailed information about the events of *raj'a*. Thus he writes:

> Others advise us saying: first you must think, gain knowledge, do scientific (*'ilmī*) research, read books, attend religious classes, study under learned teachers, learn philosophy, Sufism, *fiqh* and *uṣūl* (jurisprudence), theology, logic, languages, literature, history, theosophy and ethics from the experts so that you become versed in the scriptural and rational sciences, so that you know all there is to know about the world and God and His attributes and necessary being and contingency and the philosophy of existence, the world of the unseen, substance and accident — all the secrets of creation — only then can you pass to the next stage, the stage of action: the correction of the self.[149]

That which really matters for Sharī'atī , namely societal action, does not come until much later in his parody of the Quranic process of 'knowledge - belief - action' as set out in his book **Shī'a, ḥizb-i tamām**. God-knowledge and belief are not for Sharī'atī the purpose of Quranic teaching:

> Of course, 'belief in God' must be the basis of enjoining good deeds upon others

> and prohibiting evil...but in my opinion, God's main purpose in creating man was not that man should believe in God — since God is not in need of man's belief — but rather that man should struggle in the name of his fellow men to bring about that which is good and do away with that which is evil.[150]

In Sharī'atī's interpretation of Shi'ism, and in general of Islam, action always speaks louder than words. Belief, if not played down completely, is overshadowed by the urgent call for revolutionary awareness and social responsibility. Awareness of the truth cannot come through intellectual striving or the acquisition of knowledge, declares Sharī'atī; it is only in 'becoming' that we can really 'be' and discover the truth. It is only in action that the truth manifests itself.[151]

Sharī'atī's Islam is not the Islam of individual man gaining knowledge of God, believing in Him, correcting himself and acting as an example for others in order to gain salvation; rather, his Islam is a vehicle for collective, political expression in which belief is merely assumed to be there as a basis, in which action is all important, and in which the key tenets of the faith are reduced to little more than political formulae. When once considers the concepts of *intiẓār* and *raj'a* as expressed in the **Biḥār**, in which Islam is reduced to waiting to avenge the Imams while patiently enduring oppression, it is easy to see why Sharī'atī placed so much emphasis on social responsibility and societal action, or why the ultimate goal that he preached as the most external expression of his beliefs was nothing but permanent revolution. But in his rejection of the figures of authority in the world of Islamic scholarship — the *faqīh*, the *ḥakīm*, the *mutakallim* and the *adīb*

— and his assumption that the *fuqahā'* of the Safavid era were emblematic and representative of 'traditional' Islam as a whole, and which he opposed, it may be argued that Sharī'atī threw out the baby along with the bathwater. Rejection of 'traditional' Islam also meant rejection of those scholars who were just as much at odds with externalism as he was.

In short, Sharī'atī's attack on what he calls Safavid Shi'ism is concentrated fundamentally on the failure of the latter to provide the masses with a theology of protest. The externalism of the Safavid *fuqahā'* — their obsessive preoccupation with rite and ritual — comes under heavy fire, but it is not the predominance of imamocentrism to the detriment of theocentrism that concerns Sharī'atī. For him it is the obfuscation of what he perceives to be the fundamental message of Shi'ism, i.e. justice through revolution, which he takes to task. If Sharī'atī is to be given credit as the thinker who awakened the Twelver Shi'ite population of Iran in the past two decades to the revolutionary potential of the Twelver Shi'ite message, then his stance can be seen largely as a response and reaction to the externalism of the Safavid *fuqahā'*, for whom the question of revolt, rebellion or revolution was as far from their minds as concepts such as self-knowledge and gnosis. Sharī'atī does not inveigh against the tendency of the Safavid *fuqahā'* to overlook completely the question of *ma'rifa* and *īmān* precisely because he does not hold that knowledge and belief have primacy over action, unless that knowledge and belief pertain to the revolutionary 'ideology' of what he calls 'red Shi'ism', i.e. as opposed to the 'black Shi'ism' of the Safavids.[152] It is the opinion of the researcher that if the Safavid *fuqahā'* were guilty of taking for granted the belief of the people and

stressing action in the form of individual rite and ritual, Sharīʿatī is equally at fault for taking for granted belief and stressing action in the form of rebellion and revolt. What concerns Majlisī and Sharīʿatī alike is action: for Majlisī, action consists of religious ritual, while for Sharīʿatī it consists of revolution. Like Majlisī, Sharīʿatī did not invite the people to rethink their belief and reconsider their own individual position *vis-a-vis* the Creator; rather he called upon them to re-evaluate the 'revolutionary' nature of Twelver Shi'ism as exemplified by the Imams. By definition, then, Sharīʿatī was also an externalist. If Safavid Shi'ism can be summed up as the religion of *fiqh*, Sharīʿatī's Shi'ism can be summed up as the religion of politics. In either case, the central core of Islamic teaching, i.e. theocentric internalism, is either banished to the periphery or totally overlooked.

Finally, Sharīʿatī outlines his vision of the Islam of the future:

> The Islam of tomorrow will not be the Islam of the *mullā*; the Islam of Qum and Mashhad will also change. The (religious) students have shown that they do not believe what these 'signs' (*āyāt*) dictate to them; the decline of this whole class (*ṣinf*) which, with all its weapons and experience, has taken on the defenceless Ḥusayniyya, shows that the power of religion lies no longer in the hands of these official, hereditary guardians (*mutawalliyyān*)...The Islam of tomorrow will not be the Islam of the *Mafātīḥ* but the Islam of the Quran. The Shi'ism of tomorrow will be the Shi'ism not of Sultan Ḥusayn but of Imam Ḥusayn. The religion of tomorrow will not be the religion of ignorance and oppression, blind zeal and fanaticism, outmoded ideas and superstition, indiscriminate acceptance and imitation, repetition, tears, abjection and weakness...No! the religion of tomorrow will be the religion of conscious choice and justice, awareness and freedom, revolution and revolutionary movement, construction

and science, culture, art and literature, society and responsibility , innovation and advancement...it will be forward-looking and in charge of its own destiny.[153]

To state which parts of Sharī'atī's vision have been realized and which remain unfulfilled is left to the reader. The fact remains that even though the guardians of the Islamic revolution may have failed to live up to Sharī'atī's expectations, the course they are charting is, like his and like that of their Safavid counterparts, unambiguously externalist in nature. With its emphasis on action, on continuous revolution, on an Islam that must be seen to be done, the present Islamic regime may on the surface appear worlds apart from its Safavid ancestor, and with respect to method it most certainly is. Yet insofar as the obfuscation of the central message of *īmān* is concerned, the present regime has, by substituting politics for *fiqh*, taken over where the Safavid *fuqahā'* left off.

1. The relative insignificance of Mahdism for the Sunnites and their attacks on the doctrine as espoused and promulgated by the Shi'ites are dealt with summarily in: Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 44-6.

2. A. J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden, 1927), p. 139.

3. Verse 22:54 — "...for verily God is the Guide of those who believe, to the straight Way." Verse 25:33 — "...but enough is thy Lord to guide and help."

4. For example, see verse 7:178 — "Whom God doth guide, –he is on the right path: whom He rejects from His guidance, – such are the persons who perish."

5. I. Goldziher, *al-'Aqīda wa al-sharī'a fī al-Islām*, transl. by Muḥammad Yusūf (Cairo, 1378/1958-59), pp. 327-8, 376-8.

6. Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (Hyderabad, 1972), vol. 5, pp. 31 and 34.

7. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. by de Goeje (Leyden, 1879-1901), vol. 2, p. 546.

8. W. W. Rajkowski, *Early Shi'ism in Iraq* (Ph. D. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1955), pp. 166-7.

9. Verses 39:30-31 — "Truly wilt thou die (one day), and truly they (too) will die (one day). In the end will ye (all), on the Day of Judgement, settle your disputes in the presence of your Lord."

10. Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī'a*, ed. by Ritter (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 33-4.

11. See: Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 10-11. For a fuller account of the Kaysanite roots of the Abbasid movement, see: Anṣārī, *Madhāhib ibtidā'athā al-siyāsa fī al-Islām* (Beirut, 1973), pp. 152-8, 199-214.

12. Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Iqbāl* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 53.

13. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma* (Tehran, 1378/1958-59), p. 37.

14. Hāshim Ma'rūf al-Ḥasanī, *Sīrat al-a'imma al-ithnā 'ashar* (Beirut, 1397/1976-77), vol. 1, p. 370.

15. Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 1368.

16. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Cairo, 1356/1937-38), vol. 4, pp. 505-6.

17. Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 1368.

18. *Kamāl al-dīn*, pp. 286-7; *Tirmidhī*, vol. 4, pp. 505-6.

19. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis* (Cairo, n.d.), p. 363.

20. Muhammad Salih Osman, *Mahdism in Islam up to 260 A.H./ 874 and its relation to Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Messianism* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1976), p. 204.

21. See: 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-'Abbād, *'Aqīdat ahl al-sunna wa al-athar fī al-mahdī al-muntaẓar* (Qumm, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 33-5.

22. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (Cairo, 1313/1895-96), vol. 5, p. 294.

23. Luṭfullāh al-Ṣāfī Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar fī al-imām al-thānī 'ashar* (Tehran, n.d.), p. 40.

24. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 398.

25. Dānishpazhūh, *Fihrist*, vol. 3, pp. 1203-13.

26. These topics span volumes 51-53 of the new edition of *Biḥār al-anwār* (*Biḥār II*).

27. Nu'mānī, also known as Ibn Abī Zaynab, studied *ḥadīth* transmission under Kulaynī in Baghdad. He endeavoured to prove the necessity of the occultation by relating traditions on the authority of the Prophet and the Imams predicting its occurrence. He took most of his traditions from early authors who wrote on the subject, regardless of their doctrinal views. He was the first scholar to posit two occulations. He died in Syria around the year 360/970-71.

28. *Biḥār II*, vol. 52, p. 101.

29. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 114.

30. *ibid.*, vol. 52, pp. 101-2.

31. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 105.

32. On the doctrine of *badā'* and its relationship with Mahdism, see: Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, pp. 153-6.

33. *Biḥār II*, vol. 52, p. 104; vol. 53, p. 97.

34. For Majlisī's *abjad* calculations, see: *Biḥār II*, vol. 52, pp. 107-9.

35. *ibid.*, vol. 52, pp. 110-11.

36. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 135.

37. *ibid.*, vol. 52, pp. 110-11.

38. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 111.

39. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 113.

40. Verses 2:155-7 — "Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss of goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give good tidings to those who patiently persevere, – who say, when afflicted with calamity: 'To God we belong, and to Him is our return': – they are those on whom (descend) blessings from God, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance."

41. Hans Wehr, *Arabic Dictionary*, pp. 975-77.

42. For example, verses 3:186, 3:200, 10:109 and 40:155.

43. *Biḥār II*, vol. 52, p. 122.

44. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 122.

45. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 123.

46. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 125.

47. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 124.

48. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 125.

49. *ibid.*

50. *ibid.*, vol. 52, pp. 127-8.

51. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 133.

52. *ibid.*

53. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 136.

54. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 139.

55. *ibid.*, vol. 52, p. 138.

56. *ibid.*, vol. 52, pp. 139-40.

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129. Mufaḍḍal was a former follower of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, the founder of the extremist Khaṭṭābiyya sect. His early views are discussed in: Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Kashī, *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Mashhad, 1348 Sh./1969-70), pp. 321-29.

130. The 'knowledge of the Hour' (*'ilm al-sā'a*) is presented in the Quran as knowledge of the day of reckoning and not the rise of the Mahdi as posited in the tradition. For example, see verses 31:34 and 34:3.

131. Astonishingly, Majlisī seems to be unaware of the fact that he himself was open to charges of *shirk* by dint of his *abjad* predictions of the time of the Mahdi's rise and re-appearance.

132. See verse 22:78.

133. *Biḥār II*, vol. 53, pp. 1-38.

134. *ibid.*, vol. 53, p. 37.

135. *ibid.*

136. Verse 42:30 — 'Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because of the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness.'

137. Verse 17:71 — 'One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams: those who are given their record in their right hand will read it (with pleasure), and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least.'

138. Verse 6:164.

139. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Tashayyu'-i 'alawī wa tashayyu'-i Ṣafawī* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973-74)

140. *ibid.*, pp. 320-1.

141. *ibid.*, p. 321.

142. *ibid.*, pp. 321-2.

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150. *ibid.*, p. 81.

151. *ibid.*, p. 19.

152. 'Alī Sharī'atī, *Bā mukhāṭab-hā-i āshinā* (Tehran: Ḥusayniyya-i Irshād, 1397/1976-77), p. 142.

153. *ibid.*, p. 14.

Conclusions

The rise to predominance of the *fuqahā'* in the Islamic world of learning in general, and in the Twelver Shi'ite sphere in particular, has at its roots two major factors: ambiguity and confusion over the precise meaning and practical implications of the terms *īmān* and *islām*, and the changes in meaning undergone by key Quranic terms such as *'ilm, 'ulamā'* and *fiqh*.

The Quran posits a clear, albeit highly idealistic, process through which a man must go in order to be able to call himself a Muslim: deliberation (*tafakkur* on the cosmos; knowledge (*'ilm*) of its nature and meaning, and of the existence of a Creator to which all created beings as 'signs' (*āyāt*) point; belief (*īmān*) in the Creator; submission (*islām*) of the heart to all of the truths that belief implies; and adherence to the rites, rules and regulations of the communal religion known as Islam. However, this schema rarely corresponds with reality, for as the Quran itself asserts, most men do not ponder, or truly believe, or truly submit — and of those who do come to believe, most do so deficiently, while many of those who claim to have submitted have, in actual fact, submitted only through their practice of the external acts of Islam, and not in the internal, spiritual sense of *islām*, which is the domain of the heart and the perfection of belief.

That *īmān* and *islām* are conceptually different is quite plain from several Quranic verses. Both Shi'ite and Sunnite traditions also reflect this. The fact that *īmān* is the basis for *islām*/Islam and thus totally fundamental is also a matter for agreement between various Sunnite and Shi'ite scholars, past and present.

However, ambiguity in the use of the word *islām*, which in Arabic cannot be

differentiated from the word Islam by the use of capitals as it can in English, tended to blur the distinction between the internal, personal submission of the individual (*islām*) and the formal profession of adherence to the religious community (Islam). This was compounded by the inability — or unwillingness — on the part of certain early exegetes to clarify the distinction. This may have been the result of a desire to preserve unity, a reflection of the belief that in the very earliest Islamic community, all Muslims were also *muslims*. The idea that *islām* is a question of birthright, or that belief is only possible through *islām* — ideas which are alien to the Quran — began to appear in Quranic commentaries of both Sunnite and Shi'ite scholars; in this light it is not difficult to understand why individuals born into an Islamic environment may consider themselves to be believers purely by dint of their affiliation to the Muslim community, and thus, by equating *īmān* with Islam, shift the emphasis that should, according to the Quran, be on the internal truths of belief rather than the external display of submission.

Parallel to the developments in the understanding of the terms *īmān* and *islām* came the changes which occurred in the meaning of key Quranic terms such as *'ilm*, *'ulamā'* and *fiqh*. Given the fact that most Muslims were oriented to the externals of Islam — the *furū' al-dīn*, it was only natural, thanks to the simple question of supply and demand, that from among the ranks of Muslim scholars it was the jurists, the *fuqahā'* who would predominate. By the end of the 6th/12th century, scholars such as al-Ghazālī were in a position to bemoan the fact that the true knowledge — the knowledge of self, of God and of the Hereafter — had been overshadowed by the knowledge of externals, of the minutiae of the myriad rules and regulations which govern the everyday practices of Islam. The terms *'ilm* and *fiqh*, which originally

denoted knowledge of God came now to mean knowledge of God's commands, while the term *ulamā'* — which in the Quran denoted those who know, and thus fear, the Creator, was now applied to anyone versed in the 'subsidiary principles of Islam', the *furū' al-dīn.* Gradually there came into existence two groups of scholars: the 'externalists', who were basically concerned with knowledge of God's commands, and thus with Islam; and the 'internalists', who aspired to self-knowledge (*ma'rifat al-nafs*) and knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*). Internalism was traditionally the preserve of the Sufi brotherhoods, although there were exceptions. There were also individuals who endeavoured to preserve the harmony that is supposed to exist between the internal and external facets of Islam, putting greater emphasis on *īmān* but not forsaking the practical demands of Islamic law.

Pre-Safavid Iran was dominated by two main religious currents: mainstream or 'high' Sufism; and *ghuluww* or extremist folk-Sufism with a markedly pro-'Alīd flavour. The spirit of internalism lived on during this period in the form of orthodox Sunnite Sufi orders, of which the Safavids were, in their early stage, a prime example. From Anatolia through Iran and into Transoxania, 'high' Sufi orders such as the Mawlawiyya, the Ni'matullāhiyya and the Naqshbandiyya were the main channels of internalist expression. Devotion to the family of 'Alī was clearly evident in these orders, but this cannot be construed as being the moderate Shi'ism (*tashayyu'-i ḥasan*) that has often been evoked as one of the reasons Twelver Shi'ism was able later to impose itself so swiftly on the Iranian populace. Extremism, or *ghuluww*, came in the form of popular movements and quasi-Sufi orders with highly unorthodox and even heretical beliefs concerning in particular the Shi'ite Imams. Unlike the 'high' Sufis, the *ghulāt* seemed largely to have considered the *sharī'a* defunct, and its

laws and ordinances went unheeded. Undisciplined religiosity — strictly speaking, neither internalist nor externalist — allowed political and military ambition to run riot, and it is largely from the *ghulāt* that the various popular anti-establishment revolts that took place in the area during this period found their inspiration.

In the externalist sense, the majority of the Iranian populace was Sunnite, adhering to the Shafi'ite and Hanafite schools of jurisprudence. The rise of Sufism in general, and *ghuluww* in particular, had gone hand-in-hand with a temporary decline in orthodox religious externalism, although the adherents of the 'high' Sufi orders and groups such as the *ahl-i futuwwa* and the *ahl-i ukhuwwa* endeavoured to remain faithful to their Sunnite doctrines and observe both internalist and externalist aspects of their religion.

One such group was the Ṣafawiyya, an orthodox Sunnite-Sufi Order which, under its first four leaders, commanded the respect and reverence of rulers and masses alike. Totally in keeping with its mainstream religious internalism, the Ṣafawiyya was politically quietistic and harboured no aspirations to temporal power. With the advent of Junayd, however, the Order was transformed into a militant and military organisation with a decidedly extremist, pro-Shi'ite religious orientation: contemplative, internalist Sufism was replaced with openly heterodox *ghuluww*, a transformation that was little more than a pretext for Junayd's political ambitions. Under Junayd's son, Ḥaydar, the Ṣafawiyya increased its military activity until it was able, with the support of the fanatical and heterodox Qizilbash, to place Shah Ismā'īl I on the throne at Tabriz. With this dramatic politico-religious metamorphosis, the Ṣafawiyya were to change the face of Iran completely.

Given Ism'īl I's spiritual allegiance to the Twelve Imams, it was only logical

that he and his advisers would adopt a form of externalism that was not only in keeping with their own pro-'Alīd beliefs but which would also serve to stabilize the state. Orthodox Twelver Shi'ism, with its recognised set of principles and highly elaborate system of dogma, was the natural choice, this despite the fact that Ismā'īl and his advisers were, like the vast majority of the Iranian populace, ignorant of the finer points of Twelver doctrine: the only manual of Twelver Shi'ite jurisprudence that could be found was one that had long gathered dust in the corner of an obscure private library, and a celebrated historian of the time had trouble remembering when Twelver Shi'ism had last made an appearance on the Iranian religious scene. That the Order's sudden conversion to the Twelver cause was politically motivated is thus certain. Twelver Shi'ite orthodoxy would have the desired stabilizing effect, and its immediate propagation was vital if the doctrinal uniformity that was so crucial to Safavid retention of power was to come about. The adoption of Twelver Shi'ite religious externalism would, moreover, effectively isolate Iran from its Sunnite neighbours and thus create a stronger awareness of national identity for the Safavids to exploit.

For three hundred years prior to the advent of the Safavids, orthodox Twelver Shi'ism had developed mainly outside Iran, administering to the spiritual and jurisprudential needs of small enclaves of Twelver Shi'ite faithful in areas such as Jabal 'Āmil in southern Lebanon, al-Aḥsā' and Bahrein. The first Twelver *fuqahā'* imported by Ismā'īl hailed mainly from these areas, and from the outset it became clear that the doctrines they espoused were considerably different from those of the people upon which they were to impose the new state religion. The position of the Twelver *fuqahā'* as the representatives of the Hidden Imam, and as the repositories

of the sayings of the Imams, meant that they were markedly more oriented towards the secondary disciplines of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, and the source of scholars upon which Ismā'īl drew was almost exclusively externalist in outlook. Superficially, then, it is easy to draw parallels on this count between them and their Sunnite counterparts. The radical difference between the Twelver *fuqahā'* and the majority of the Iranian population lay not, however, in matters of *fiqh* but in matters of fundamentals of belief, the concept of *imāma* being crucial to Twelver dogma. So central was the notion of *imāma* to the Twelver Shi'ites that the relationship of most Twelvers with the spiritual life had developed on radically different lines from that of the Sunnites; whereas the latter had found a channel for internalist expression mainly in Sufism, the Twelver Shi'ites had their own form of compensation for the spiritual deficiences of legalistic religion, namely devotion to the Imam. In the words of one Imami tradition, half of the Quran concerns the things that God has allowed or prohibited, i.e. the rules and regulations of practical, everyday life, while the other half concerns the Imams and their enemies. In this light it may be concluded that although from the point of view of externalism there is little difference between Twelver Shi'ism and the four schools of Sunnite jurisprudence, on the level of internalism they are sharply divided. While the Twelver Shi'ites of the Safavid era would not have ignored the fundamental notion of belief in God, it was belief in God **through** the channel of the Imams which was of paramount importance, so much so in fact that traditions were circulated to the effect that belief in God is not possible without belief in the Imam, or that it is only through the channel of the Imams, and accordingly through the Twelver *fuqahā'* as the representatives of the Imams, that any kind of religious knowledge, be it internalistic or externalistic,

can be obtained.

The highly legalistic externalism of the Twelver *fuqahā'*, coupled with the imamocentric internalism that underpinned it, clashed immediately with the non-externalistic religious ideals of the vast majority of the Iranian population. All forms of orientation other than that of their own were suppressed by the Twelver *fuqahā'* and their followers. This was, of course, totally in line with the objectives of the nascent regime, for the consolidation of Safavid power depended on the ability of the new ruler to eradicate all potential centres of opposition. Sufism, Sunnism and Qizilbash extremism were all targets for the invective of the incoming Twelver *fuqahā'*; vilification of the first three Caliphs was institutionalised and all those objecting to the new ruling were brutally silenced. Twelver *fuqahā'* found convenient niches for themselves in the posts of *shaykh al-islām*, *imām jum'a*, *mudarris* and *pishnamāz*, from which they were able to spread the traditions of the Imams and successfully impose their doctrines on the masses.

Although the initial suppression of non-externalism was savage, and the verbal attacks in the form of anti-Sufi and anti-Sunnite treatises sustained, the Safavid era was not the 'struggle for supremacy' that some writers have claimed it to be. From the point of view of religious authority, the non-externalists — most of whom had adopted Twelver Shi'ism only nominally — could not compete with the immigrant Twelver *fuqahā'*, whose expertise in Twelver *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* guaranteed them supremacy in that particular area. From the point of view of political authority, the Twelver *fuqahā'* lacked a coherent political ethos. While in theory all governments save for that of the Hidden Imam were illegitimate, in practice there had to be a ruler; given the absence of any clear directive on the part of the Imams for their

successors, the *fuqahā'* to take the reigns of temporal power into their own hands, the Twelver jurists were for the most part more than happy to leave temporal authority to their benefactors, the Safavid rulers, while appropriating the religious allegiance of the masses for themselves.

Any struggle between the Twelver internalists and their non-externalist rivals was for the most part an ideological one, a 'war of the pen' that was to last throughout the Safavid era. As they strengthened their foothold in Iran, the *fuqahā'* flooded the mosques and *madrasas* with countless tracts and treatises on all facets of Twelver Shi'ism. The vast majority of Safavid scholarly writing was, as Afandī has shown, externalist in nature. The classical works of Twelver Shi'ism were commented upon, translated and reworked. Fundamental questions such as belief, self-knowledge and knowledge of God were conspicuous by their absence from the works of the vast majority of Twelver *fuqahā'*. The issues which most concerned the externalists centred upon points of law, upon questions such as the permissibility or impermissibility of the Friday prayer in the absence of the Imam, or upon the validity of *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* — issues which were to have vital importance for the future of the Twelver *fuqahā'* but which served, as did most of their pursuits, to obscure the basic and fundamental importance of self-knowledge and belief.

Internalist thought lived on, however, if not in the teachings of the Sufi brotherhoods then in the writings of individual internalists such as Mullā Ṣadrā, Mīr Dāmād, Mīr Findiriskī, Rajab 'Alī Tabrizī — all of them Shi'ite by name but deeply internalist and theocentric in outlook. The waxing and waning of the fortunes of these non-externalist scholars depended largely on the whims of the ruler of the day, and for the most part — at least until the reign of Shah Sulaymān and the

advent of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, although refutations and counter refutations of each other's respective outlooks continued to be written, the externalist *fuqahā'* and the non-externalist/internalist philosophers theosophers and mystics were able to co-exist relatively peacefully. Indeed, a *modus vivendi* was at times reached which allowed for the emergence of a form of Twelver Shi'ite syncretism, an overlapping of interests reflected in the writings of philosophers who were also versed in *fiqh*, or scholars who were *fuqahā'* first and foremost but who endeavoured to integrate into their writings elements of straightorward theocentric internalism.

Towering over the final decades of the Safavid era stands 'Allāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, hailed by his peers as the *mujaddid* of the age, the 'seal' of the *mujtahids* and as a scholar unique in his own time. If output is any indicator of scholarly status, then it must be conceded that he is **the** outstanding figure in the Safavid Twelver Shi'ite world of learning. No other Safavid *faqīh* has been able to match Majlisī in popularity or readership: the works which bear his name are by far the most widely read of all popular Twelver Shi'ite writings. Yet a closer look at his work reveals the fact that he contributed virtually nothing to the development of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* as scholarly disciplines.

The move from theocentrism to imamocentrism took its greatest strides during the closing decades of the Safavid era, and it was mainly under the auspices of Majlisī, whose major achievement was to codify the scattered sayings of the Imams into a more or less coherent whole, that the externalization of the fundamentals of Islamic belief in terms that were suitable to one particular branch of Islamic knowledge, namely *fiqh* and *ḥadīth*, reached its zenith. The key, quite obviously, lay in the accessibility of the basic doctrines of Twelver Shi'ite doctrine to the people

at large. Writing mostly in Persian, Majlisī was able to reach the widest possible audience. Conveying simple, uncluttered dogma in the language of the common people — whom he was said to despise — he was able to draw on the general tendency of the Muslim masses towards the superficial and, at the same time, fill the spiritual vacuum that had appeared as a result of the decline of the Sufi brotherhoods with treatise after treatise on the lives, sayings, trials, tribulations, miracles and powers of the Imams. Concerned primarily with the exoteric trappings of the faith, with the practical aspects of Islam rather than *īmān*, and with the personae of the Imams rather than the truths of revelation, Twelver Shi'ism under the auspices of Majlisī became truly orthodox, and all other views were rejected and often forcibly repressed. True to his externalist ideals, Majlisī preached that *īmān* was incomplete without belief in the Imam , and that and *'ilm* was confined to knowledge of the sayings of the Imams, and of the myriad ordinances narrated from them which were meant to regulate every facet of the Twelver Shi'ite believer's life. If, for Majlisī , *'ilm* consists primarily in the knowledge of *ḥadīth*, then the Quranic verse which states that the *'ulamā'* are the most fearful of God's slaves must refer, in his schema, to the *fuqahā'*; as a corollary, Majlisī and his co-jurists are elevated to a position of veneration in the Twelver Shi'ite community second only to the Prophet and the Imams. The famous tradition which states that 'the *'ulamā'* are the inheritors of the prophets' most conveniently confirms this. It is thus that Majlisī was able to firmly cement the religious base of the *fuqahā'* among the people, since it is inconceivable for a simple believer to doubt the credibility of a *faqīh* for the simple reason that he is, first and foremost, a representative of the Imam and, secondly, because since he is an *'ālim*, and thus fearful of God, he must

be beyond reproach.

If externalism and non-externalism/internalism had been able to co-exist relatively peacefully before, this was hardly the case during the lifetime of Majlisī. Majlisī tackled the problem of internalist opposition by tarring both popular, antinomian folk-Sufism and orthodox, 'high' Sufism with the same brush, accusing all of those under the Sufi banner of heterodoxy, innovation and unbelief. All Sufis — and thus all who pay what must have seemed to Majlisī to be inordinate attention to the inner realities of belief — were declared unbelievers and deserving of hellfire. The vices of the Shah, however, despite being equally as objectionable Islamically-speaking as the antinomian exploits of the Sufis, did not seem to concern the 'Allāma, who, more than any other Safavid *faqīh* championed the monarchy and hailed the Safavid kings as precursors of the rule of the Hidden Imam.

It is in the context of the occultation of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi, that the externalism of Majlisī and the Twelver *fuqahā'* comes into sharp focus. According to the traditions presented by Majlisī in his *magnum opus*, the *Biḥār al-anwār*, the absence of the Hidden Imam is a period of great trial for the Twelver Shi'ites, the pain of which will be alleviated only with the return of the Mahdi and the reappearance of the other eleven Imams. During the occultation, all governments are usurpatory and thus illegal. The Twelver Shi'ites, however, must endure tyranny and oppression with patience and steadfastness. They must neither revolt nor support rebellion, for any who rise to claim power before the return of the Mahdi will be classed as infidels. The Twelver faithful must keep calm and cling to the teachings of the Imams as conveyed to them by their representatives and inheritors, the *fuqahā'*. Justice will come only with the return of the Mahdi and the dramatic

reappearance of the rest of the *ahl al-bayt.*What is apparent, however, from Majlisī's presentation of the doctrine is that justice will be limited to the vengeance that the Imams will seek from their long dead but now miraculously resuscitated opponents. If the doctrine of Mahdism in general serves to deflect attention from the notion of divine justice and personal salvation that is to obtain following the Resurrection, then the uniquely Twelver Shi'ite doctrine of *raj'a* — the return of the Imams — shifts the attention even further away from the idea of universal peace and justice that is to accrue from the revival of pristine Islam and focuses, directly, on the personages of the Imams themselves. While the relief from tyranny that will supposedly be enjoyed by all believers as a result of the *raj'a* of the Imams is presented as the most obvious corollary of their return, it is the revenge that will be wrought on their old opponents — on Abū Bakr and 'Umar in particular — that overshadows all other considerations and appears to be, in the final analysis, the sole reason for their return from the grave. In the concept of the occultation, the rise of the Mahdi and the appearance of the Imams with their new book and their new, revitalized Islam, the tragedy of the Imams reaches its climax, and the imamocentric internalism of the Twelver Shi'ite *fuqahā'* has its finest hour.

Finally, it must be said that while Majlisī's writings still command respect in certain Twelver circles even today, many of the more contentious and controversial narrations presented by him in his vast corpus of writings have been dismissed as spurious. Majlisī himself has been discredited by certain modern Twelver writers as a bigot and a charlatan who forged traditions in order to curry favour with the rulers of the day, and who championed political quietism in favour of the status quo in order to maintain the high profile of the *faqīh* in Twelver Shi'ite social and religious

life. Reaction against the politcal quietism of Majlisī and his fellow *fuqahā'* can be seen as a major factor in the acquisition by twentieth-century Twelver Shi'ism of a new and revolutionary face: a Shi'ism that does not advocate the teaching of endless tracts on the minutiae of ablution, or upon the need to take revenge on the oppressors of 'Alī or Ḥusayn, but rather a Shi'ism that stresses social awareness and constant revolution. A Shi'ism that, by stressing politics rather than *fiqh*, and revolution rather than weeping over the death of Ḥusayn, continues, deliberately or unwittingly as the case may be, to obscure the fundamentals of belief.

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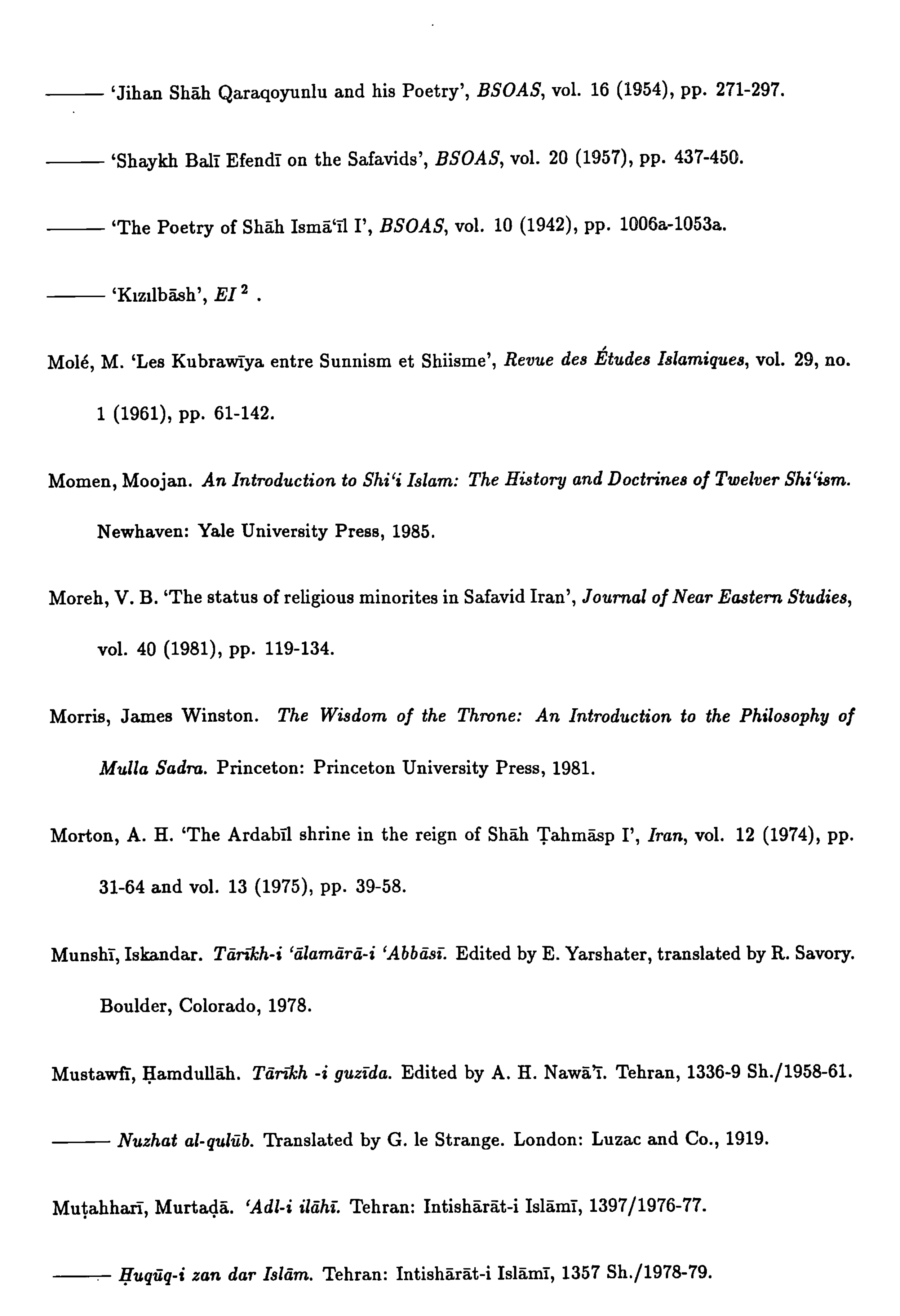
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